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ABSTRACT

The role of generic skills in the lives, work, and employment of 127 dislocated workers in a broad cross-section of job categories in five areas of Australia were examined through individual interviews, focus groups, and a survey questionnaire. Selected findings are as follows: (1) generic skills are developed in all areas of human endeavor, including in the family, education, community, and employment environments; (2) demand for high levels of generic skills and technical skills and different kinds of generic skills (for example, entrepreneurship and enthusiasm for change) are becoming more highly valued, whereas "traditional" generic skills (such as teamwork) are being devalued; (3) although many study participants considered themselves reasonably well prepared for the demands of the current employment market, others believed that their skills had been superseded and that their values and aspirations no longer matched the requirements of work in the new economy. The study findings challenged current vocational education and training practice by demonstrating that generic skills are basically developed through experiential learning, and they reflected the need for structures and services that support lifelong learning within and beyond the world of work. (Twenty-six tables/figures are included. The bibliography lists 101 references. The following items are appended: case studies; descriptions of the research method and sample; responses to questions relating to generic skills; and the survey instrument.) (MN)

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# Making experience work

## Generic skills through the eyes of displaced workers – Volume 1

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# Making experience work

## Generic skills through the eyes of displaced workers – Volume 1

*Crina Virgona*

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NCVER

**Publisher's note**

The report has been divided into two volumes. The detailed description of the project is contained in volume 1. Volume 2 contains the case studies referred to throughout the report, and other appendices, and is available only in pdf format that can be downloaded from the NCVER website <http://www.ncver.edu.au>.

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# Executive summary

This report presents the findings of qualitative research which sought to develop a better understanding of generic skills in life, work and (re)employment. The study draws on the voices and experiences of displaced workers. This group has had to seek alternative employment and hence would be very aware of the importance of generic skills—those skills which can be transferred to a new employment context. The aim of the research was to use the insights of this group of people in addressing key issues in the generic skills debate.

The workers who participated in this study were mostly experienced, older workers who had been displaced from the workforce at some time in their career. The report analyses their accounts of the development and adaptation of their own generic skills through changing circumstances of employment and unemployment. Most of the participants in this study have had to face the prospect of employment or unemployment (and hence their 'employability') in a shrinking and increasingly competitive and restructured labour market.

The main questions this study investigated are:

- How are generic skills perceived and understood by displaced workers?
- How have working people developed generic skills?
- How has work contributed to the development of generic skills?
- How are generic skills developed and reconstructed at work?
- How do generic skills transfer to a new context?
- How can vocational education and training (VET) practitioners and enterprises foster the development of generic skills?
- How can the VET system best assist the development of generic skills for the new workforce?
- What means of assessment can best represent generic skills for experienced workers?
- What is the relationship between generic skills and employability?

## Research method

The study was qualitative in nature. Data were collected by three different methods: individual interviews, focus groups and a survey questionnaire. A total of 127 displaced workers participated in the study in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and regional Victoria. The sample represented a broad cross-section of the workforce in terms of job categories. Most participants (80%) had undertaken some form of post-school education and training or re-training in order to maintain or obtain employment.

## Results

The results of this study demonstrate how generic skills are developed in all areas of human endeavour, in family, education and community environments, as well as in the context of employment. The study finds, however, that the primary context for the development of generic skills is work, and that the primary mode of acquisition is experiential learning.

The study also reveals how the changing nature of work has impacted on the issue of generic skills. There are now demands for high levels of generic skills (as well as technical skills) and different kinds of generic skills (for example, entrepreneurialsm and enthusiasm for change) are now valued while the more 'traditional' generic skills are being devalued.

While many of those who participated in this study felt that they were reasonably well prepared for the demands of the current employment market, others felt that their skills had been superseded, and that their values and aspirations no longer matched the requirements of work in the new economy.

The study also raised questions about how generic skills are transferred from one work context to another. This study argues that transferability is poorly understood and crowded with assumptions that do not bear critical scrutiny. The work of Down (2001) describes the transfer process as neither automatic nor passive. She advocates a process of packing, unpacking and repacking skills in the transfer process. This study supports the educational value of such an approach.

## Issues and implications

The findings of this study pose considerable challenges for various stakeholders within the VET system.

First, they challenge current VET practice by demonstrating that generic skills are basically developed through experiential learning. The challenge is for practitioners to create opportunities for skill development through experiential learning in workplaces and in more formal educational settings, such as technical and further education (TAFE) institutes. Practitioners need to assist individuals to reflect upon their experiences and to consciously identify and develop the transferable capacities that may be drawn from these experiences. Practitioners need also to conceptualise learning activities within VET in relation to this important insight. This implies a fundamental renegotiation of the ways in which VET practitioners work within workplaces and classrooms.

Second, the findings challenge employers to provide working environments in which employees would be able to develop and utilise their generic skills. For this to happen, workplaces need to ensure the involvement of workers in problem-solving, and in continual learning through shared processes of reflection on practice. In this context there are implications for work organisation and the ways work relationships are valued and developed.

Third, the findings reflect the need for structures and services which support lifelong learning within and beyond the world of work. The legitimate needs of displaced workers for access to support, training and recognition of prior learning processes must be recognised. The study has shown that support groups and re-training opportunities provided by TAFE (where they exist) have been invaluable in offering the kinds of support, advice and training which maximise the chances of unemployed people returning to the workforce. Those groups and training programs need to be widely available and properly resourced so that their access is assured for all displaced workers.

Fourth, there is a challenge that goes beyond the VET system to other training and education sectors, including the adult and community education sector, and workplaces. As generic skills

have gained prominence within the context of employability, there is a need for professional development for teachers and trainers in this area. The existing Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training does not equip teachers and trainers to know how to support and promote the development or transfer of generic skills.

# Introduction

## Purpose of the study

This project aims to respond to Yates's (1998) call for research that can be used by 'social planners and policy-makers to assist them in addressing … complex societal issues'. It is one of several concurrent research projects funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) investigating generic skills, with a view to informing vocational education and training (VET) policy and practice (see Hawke (forthcoming); Clayton et al. (forthcoming); Callan 2003). In particular, it is hoped that this study will inform policy and practice in relation to generic skills to better meet the needs of the increasing cohort of older and displaced workers wanting, or needing, to remain in the labour force.

As this research shows, there are complexities, tensions and contradictions surrounding notions of generic skills and 'skills for employability'. Commonly accepted understandings of generic skills are being contested, and displaced workers are challenged to reinterpret their skills to maintain their relevance in a fast-changing market environment. This study has been conducted at a time when the nature and patterns of work (and employment) are evolving and as the Australian population and its workforce are simultaneously ageing. The study is framed by these shifting circumstances which are reflected in calls for lifelong learning for all.

This study is qualitative in nature. It aims to examine the nature of generic skills through the lives and experiences of the research participants, who were all displaced workers. The study describes how they gathered their store of generic skills and how their skills have served them to perform effectively at work. The project has identified and utilised a number of interrelated points of interest. These are:

- displaced and experienced workers and their views and understandings of generic skills and the new workforce situation
- the ways in which their generic skills have been developed
- their reflections and anecdotes on their workplaces and how these contributed to the development of their generic skills
- how well their generic skills transfer to new contexts
- the VET system and how it can best respond to their needs
- the role of workplaces in developing the generic skills of their workers.

## Generic skills and displaced workers

Displaced workers were selected for this study on generic skills for a number of reasons. Through union, industry and workplace contacts, the researchers were aware of significant numbers of people being retrenched and the challenges these people were facing in addressing the requirements for employability in the 'new economy'. Many of the union accounts described the circumstances of older, experienced workers—many still 'too young to retire'—who wished

to remain in employment. Their stories suggested they had already experienced considerable shifts and changes during their working lives.

In addition, it was felt that some members of this group were representative of the phenomenon of sequential contract employment, a phenomenon that the new economy holds up as characterising the workforce of the future. Such individuals are determining a construct of career that is new for many. They are coming to terms with the lifelong-learning expectations that the changing nature of work has forced upon them. It was expected that these people would:

- have a wide range of generic skills based on a lifetime's experience in work, home and community activities as well as in education and training
- have probably learnt for themselves many of the things they needed to know (that is, learning to learn, learning from experience or having been self-taught)
- probably be under pressure to reinvent themselves to meet the demands of the changed employment market
- be most likely to have had to confront (at some level) the issue of their generic/transferable skills in relation to the employment market
- have already managed a number of transitions in their careers
- be in a position to reflect and comment upon issues of transferability and how they developed and carried 'generic skills' from one position to another.

The experiences and images shared with the research team by this group of people have provided a new and different lens with which to examine the complex and contested notion of generic skills and the related educational and policy issues.

# Understanding generic skills

## Generic skills in the 'new' workplace, the 'new' economy

> There is something remarkably different about the changes that the world is currently experiencing. The pace of change has never been greater, and its impact never more far reaching. Theorists such as Stuart Hall use the term 'New Times' to refer to the social, economic, political and cultural changes of a *deeper* kind, characterised by differentiation and fragmentation rather than homogeneity and standardisation. No one is able to escape the reach of these changes because they shape the context—the material and cultural conditions of existence—within which people must now interpret their lives and construct their futures. (Rizvi & Lingard 1996, p.vii)

For many of the participants of this study—the displaced workers—the reality of the 'New Times' is a world where work has become a transitory feature of their lives, made up of fragmentary part-time, casual and short-term employment. Their stories put a human face on the processes of corporatisation, restructuring, downsizing, privatisation, takeovers, bankruptcies, and the centralisation of services and enterprises, which have affected their employment and the way their work has been organised. The informants in this study told stories that revealed in detail how the economic realities of the 'New Times' are impacting on their lives and on their employment prospects. Their stories also showed the ways in which they are re-interpreting their lives, finding new identities, and attempting to 'construct their futures', and the place of generic skills in these processes.

This study took place during a time of change which some commentators claim has been unprecedented. Information technology has compressed time, finance flows unhindered across national boundaries and information has become a commodity in its own right (Castells 1996). The new economy is seen as unique in that it is knowledge-based (Drucker 1993; Castells 1996), pressured by change, innovation and high performance and dedicated to lifelong learning (Robinson & Arthy 1999). It is also characterised by shifting patterns of work and employment towards part-time, casual and short-term work (Marginson 2000; Waterhouse, Wilson & Ewer 1999; VandenHeuvel & Wooden 1999).

In the new workplace employees are required to negotiate their competence (Mulcahy & James 1998) and manage their own learning and career development. Workplace innovation has demanded new skills and new learning, particularly when workplace organisation and restructuring has pushed decision-making and responsibility down the hierarchy (Smith [ed.] 1999 Sefton, Waterhouse & Cooney 1995). Added to these requirements are skills of self-advocacy, entrepreneurial consciousness and financial planning. These skills are of increasing relevance to those in mid-career (Alferoff 1999; Ball 2000). Hence there are new generic skills that serve to realise the aspirations of competitive global economies. Other generic skills have been refashioned to fit the new workplace climate. Complexity and variability are the dominant features of the new workplace in terms of both demand and personnel.

Buchanan et al. (2001) were commissioned by the New South Wales Board of VET to produce a substantial report on the way in which work and skills are linked, how this linkage is likely to change in the future and options for policy-makers to shape the linkage. They took a critical view

of the 'new' workplace, noting that even in the 'new economy', for every highly skilled knowledge worker, there are likely to be several lower-order keyboard operators. They highlight the importance of 'skill ecosystems'. That is:

> ... clusters of high, intermediate and low-level competencies in a particular region or industry. Moreover, whilst 'high skill ecosystems' (eg IT) are important as engines of growth and development, it is now clear they will not generate mass employment in the way of some intermediate and routine ecosystems (eg cleaning) whilst other ecosystems are important for the social value of their work (eg family support services). The challenge for policy makers is to move beyond the impossible dream of a 'high skill economy' to combine a diverse range of policy instruments across a wide range of portfolios to manage a diverse bundle of skill ecosystems. (Buchanan et al. 2001, p.2)

Addressing a different aspect of the 'new economy' Owen and Bound (2001) investigated the new world of work, paying particular attention to what they termed 'loosely coupled strategic alliances'. They note that:

> ... in the knowledge-based economy, greater value is placed on human resources and 'intellectual capital'. In rapidly changing workplaces, continuous training and retraining need to be underpinned by attitudes towards continuous learning ... Implications for the VET system are that it will need to be oriented toward continual skills upgrading as existing skills become obsolete with increasing rapidity ... This leads many researchers to conclude that generic competencies will increase in importance. (Owen & Bound 2001, p.25)

## Generic skills, training and the older worker

> ... governments are now encouraging older workers to remain in the labour force for as long as possible. One strategy which would help encourage them to do so, as well as to optimise their value in the labour force, is to ensure that older workers are provided with the necessary training opportunities to maintain and enhance their employment potential and avoid skill obsolescence. (Cully, Vanderlleuvel & Wooden 2000, p.2)

At a time when Australia's population is ageing these authors note that older workers are less likely to gain access to training than younger people. They also stress that: 'Older workers, in particular, thus run the risk of the skills and competencies they have developed during their working life becoming devalued as new technologies are introduced' (Cully, Vanderlleuvel & Wooden 2000, p.2).

Their findings tend to be corroborated by other recent studies examining training needs of older workers. Wooden et al. (2001) conducted a detailed investigation into the barriers to training for older workers. This substantial study highlights the multiple barriers to training reported by people over 45 years, including:

> ... the absence of paid work; a decline with age in the capacity to learn; particular education and occupational characteristics, such as low level of education attainment and concentration in low skilled jobs, of the current older age cohort (the cohort effect); a public policy environment that has encouraged early retirement from age 55; discrimination by employers on the basis of the assumed work attitudes of older employees; and older persons' self-perceptions about the lack of value in undertaking further training. (Wooden et al. 2001, p.239)

The authors particularly note the importance of connections between work-related training and employment. Indeed they stress that for unemployed older persons:

> Unless training was offered in conjunction with paid work, many of the unemployed stated that they believed that it [training] was of little value to them ... From this perspective, addressing the training needs of older persons should be subsidiary to helping them secure employment. (Wooden et al. 2001, pp.238–9)

Their study also confirmed widespread evidence of age discrimination.

> In all of the focus groups … age discrimination in the hiring process was repeatedly mentioned. Furthermore, there was a widespread perception among the unemployed participants that it was not only employers who discriminate against older people, but also training providers such as TAFE, and employment service providers (both government and non-government alike). The participants felt that they were coming up against the 'brick wall' barrier of their age. (Wooden et al. 2001, p.279)

Similar findings on discrimination are also reported by Smith (ed. 1999), Misko (1999) and Milthorpe (1999). The Wooden et al. (2001) study reports both subtle and overt forms of discrimination and notes that one of the unfortunate consequences of this discrimination is the 'internalisation by older people themselves of the negative attitudes of employers and the community in general about the capabilities and assumed financial needs of older people' (Wooden et al. 2001, p.242). These findings on issues of discrimination are also significant for their focus on the so-called 'soft skills'.

> A more covert form of discrimination can apply when the job requirements include a set of not clearly specified 'soft skills'. These soft skills often refer to personal attitudes of flexibility, enthusiasm and responsiveness that in employer minds may be more readily associated with young people. The expected soft skills in service jobs may also include physical attractiveness as well as a deferential attitude. (Wooden et al. 2001, p.242)

Smith (ed. 1999) also identifies the loss of security of employment formerly offered by large enterprises and the public sector, and notes how older workers 'often bear the brunt of these enforced changes in working life' (ed. Smith 1999, p.105). He describes the 'triple dynamic' of factors influencing the participation of older people in the workforce, 'employer's requirements driven by demographic change, the interests of the state to reduce financial outlays on older people and the needs of older people to remain active longer' (ed. Smith 1999, p.106). He discusses the policy implications for VET of the ageing workforce and increasing participation by older persons, and notes that significant numbers of older people choose to extend their working lives through self-employment. He reports that where individuals were able to take advantage of well-developed 'transferable or general skills', they were better able to handle the necessary career changes. He stresses that the interviewees reported learning from a wide variety of sources and that:

> Their success at finding employment at a mature age was linked directly to their ability to realise the value of these skills by applying them in a different work context … The key to the utilisation of skills lay in the ability of the older person to 'let go' of their previous occupational identity and create new career opportunities. (ed. Smith 1999, p.108)

Smith also notes that older people tend to be more tactical in their approach to training and tend to focus on skills that may be directly applied to employment and/or owning a business.

In looking at displaced workers, this study was not restricted to older workers, but rather to those who had been displaced from the workplace for one reason or another. The average age of displaced workers in this study was 46 years, with a range of 16 to over 65 years. Thus, while older displaced workers predominate in this study, the study is not exclusively about their experiences.

## Discourses of policy and practice

Some useful work has been done on the nature and need for generic skills in industry (Down 1993, 2000; Crowley, Garrick & Hager 2000; Field & Mawer 1996). More recently a substantial review of Australian and overseas literature was completed by Kearns (2001) and during the life of this project a substantial report on these issues was prepared for the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia (Curtis & McKenzie 2001).

Hence this section does not attempt to reproduce a comprehensive overview of the literature. It aims to focus on some aspects of the generic skills debate that have not previously received a great deal of attention.

There has been considerable debate in recent times about the definition, nature and composition of generic skills (Mayer 1992; Kearns 2001; Curtis & McKenzie 2001). Debates have addressed the sorts of skills, competencies and attributes to be included or excluded in various lists. These various discussions and debates take place within what theorists refer to as 'discourses'. Based on the work of Foucault (1972), discourse theory tells us that we construct meaning through social processes of engagement and interaction with others. The discourse of a given social group shapes the ways words are used and what they mean. Within particular discourse communities, meanings come to be shared and commonly understood. Discourses also shape what is acceptable or permissible, hence they encapsulate values and ideology. As a result, discourses are also laced with power (Fairclough 1989), as contending groups seek to influence the discourse. Some discourses, that is to say, some discourse communities, are more powerful than others.

The dominant discourse comes to be naturalised or taken for granted. For instance, Black (2002) cites a range of studies to show how 'commonsense' taken-for-granted understandings of literacy and numeracy as essential skills for employment can be challenged. He notes that such common understandings:

> … form part of a discourse which has ideological and therefore political implications. This is largely because, as Fairclough (1989) illustrates, these beliefs have become naturalised … the more dominant and popular the beliefs, the more natural and commonsensical they appear. (Black 2002, p.5)

Thus, while such beliefs appear obvious, Black's analysis shows that the taken-for-granted assumption that inadequate literacy and numeracy skills 'may contribute to, in fact may cause, unemployment' is highly contentious.

The commonsense understanding of generic skills has absorbed values into its framework. It names desirable behaviours such as self-motivation, adaptability and willingness to learn. According to this understanding, employees should be customer focussed and opportunistic in their interaction with the market economy. These values have shifted considerably from the values of the previous generation which was marked by a greater degree of stability and permanence.

Discourses are unstable and contested, and while employers seek to lock their preferred set of generic skills into the dominant discourse, others challenge them.

There is not the scope in this review to explore the significance of discourse theory. However, this brief theoretical account is mentioned to clarify the stance taken in this project since there are multiple discourses shaping concepts of 'generic skills'. For instance, as Kearns (2001) points out the American understanding is somewhat different from the British and European discussions of generic skills. However, at the risk of oversimplifying the discussion, it is useful to appreciate that the literature of generic skills sits within (at least) two different but related discourses. There is the discourse of VET policy-makers and employer representatives and the discourse of VET practitioners. Both groups use terms such as 'generic skills', 'key competencies' and 'soft skills', and within these discourses the debates will continue about definitions. However, it may be that, even when there is agreement about the list(s), the understandings of generic skills are not the same within these different discourses (see figure 1). Given that our participants were speaking mainly with practitioners and from the standpoint of their own development and experiences, as well as from the viewpoint of their work experience and potential employment, their contributions tended to reflect aspects of each discourse.

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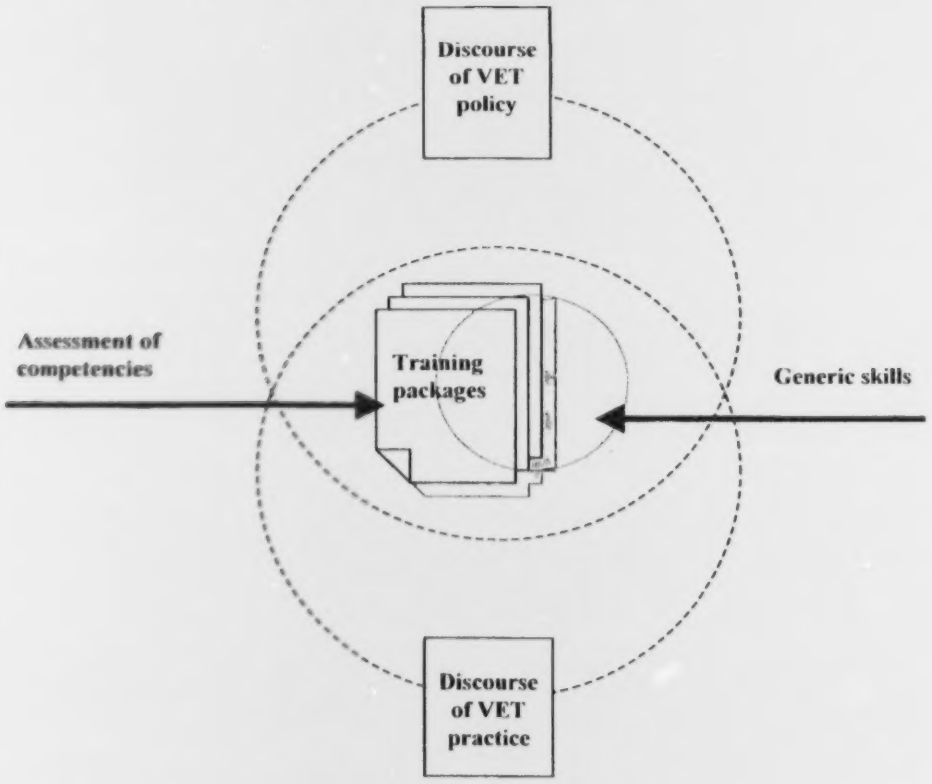
**Figure 1: Discourses of policy and practice**




Stevenson and colleagues conducted a critical examination of generic skills in the context of small businesses within the tourism and hospitality industry (ed. Stevenson 1996). Working with the framework of the key competencies (Mayer 1992), the researchers conducted a series of nine studies investigating 'questions about the relationship between capacities needed for competence in particular workplace sites and so-called generic, necessary or key competencies' (ed. Stevenson 1996, p.1). They report that:

> Taken together, the studies … indicate that, even in the case of key competencies, it is problematic to conceptualise these competencies, once operationalised in specific contexts, as value free or generic. Their expression and their meaningfulness to individual workers and their workplaces are highly situated … Thus while it may be possible conceptually to abstract a generic label for a set of site-specific capacities with superficial similarities (eg numeracy, literacy, problem solving, use of technology), at this level such entities are not the concrete or functional capacities that individuals actually use. They are meaningful only at a distance. (ed. Stevenson 1996, pp.2–3)

The distinction between the abstract conceptualisation which makes sense *only at a distance* and the actual 'functional capacities' utilised on the job is important. The former abstraction is the generic competence as it is understood by policy-makers and the latter is that which must be appreciated by VET practitioners. Within the discourse of policy-makers, the term 'generic skills' suggests a necessarily abstract and de-contextualised set of capacities. Researchers such as Black (2002) and Street (1984) have characterised this de-contextualised conception of these skills as 'autonomous'. The skills are considered to 'stand-alone', unaffected by culture or context. This discourse of generic skills is focussed on the needs of industry and the economy, and hence the need for assessments to facilitate industry-wide or even national–international comparisons. The lists and categorisations are specifically linked to employment or the *employability* of individuals.

By contrast, within the discourse of VET practitioners, 'generic skills' connotes a range of broad-based skills, knowledges and attributes that are skills and knowledges for life, further education, and social and civic participation. Practitioners tend to emphasise the holistic nature of those skills and the teaching and learning processes that facilitate their development. They are interested in these skills in context, as they are manifested, meaningful and relevant in their students' lives. That is, they are concerned with generic skills for the *development* of individuals.

Thus, even when using the same label, VET policy-makers and practitioners may be talking about quite different constructions or conceptions. In the Australian context, national training packages sit astride these different discourses. They are at once both the instruments and embodiments of policy and the tools of practice. It can be shown that the complexities and the tensions inherent in these different discursive purposes have profound implications. There are particular dangers when the differences are not recognised or acknowledged. The dominant discourse of policy-makers threatens to overwhelm the grounded understandings of practitioners and demand adherence to abstract and de-contextualised conceptions which have little utility and meaning in workplace practice or teaching and learning.

# Generic skills and the policy discourse

## 'Skill' and 'employability'

The recent survey of employers (Curtis & McKenzie 2001) established a framework of 'employability skills for the future', which includes a list of generic skills and a range of personal attributes that employers nominate as important for 'employability'. These 'employability' skills as defined by employers are those that are perceived to contribute to industry and business interests. They refer to flexibility, adaptability and self-managed skill currency. Curtis and McKenzie (2001) note that the term:

> Employability is more attractive as a descriptor than employment-related since it conveys a greater sense of an individual's long-term capacity to build a career and to prosper in a dynamic labour market. Employability implies qualities of resourcefulness, adaptability and flexibility, whereas employment-related suggests an orientation to the current state of the labour market. (Curtis & McKenzie 2001, p.6)

However, Buchanan et al. (2001) take a broader, more inclusive and critical perspective. They note that, although there have been significant gains through the National Training Reform Agenda, there is now a need to move beyond the 'flexibility model' which has been driven by an imperative to be 'responsive' to industry and employers. They argue that the 'flexibility model' is inadequate to meet the demands of changing times and there is a need to re-position policy on work and skills.

> It is now clear that too much was expected of policy reforms to work and skills. This does not mean that policy should downgrade skills and work issues but rather skills and work issues need to be more closely integrated into the wider policy mix. (Buchanan et al. 2001, p.4)

The argument to integrate policy on work and skills into the 'wider policy mix' reflects the understanding that 'employability' is not shaped by skills (or individuals) alone. Elsewhere the authors cite Keep & Mayhew (1999) to reinforce this point:

> … skills and knowledge are now widely recognised to form simply one element within a much wider matrix of factors that helps support high levels of economic performance … they have to be combined with other parts of a broader package of environmental, cultural and structural factors that can nurture and support high-performance, high value-added industries and sectors. (Keep & Mayhew 1999, pp.4–5 cited in Buchanan et al. 2001, p.37)

Buchanan et al. (2001) also stress a critical distinction between work and labour, noting that many people 'will end up undertaking labour and not work'. Policy therefore needs to 'promote

flourishing beyond the labour market by career breaks, rethinking care work and decent rates of pay and hours of work'. They also argue the importance of 'opening up the policy system to a wider range of informants', 'preconceiving clients in a fresh way', placing a stronger emphasis on 'bottom-up policy making' and 'factoring place back into the policy system, alongside client and industry' (Buchanan et al. 2001, p.46). They note that skills operate within a complex web of factors and interrelationships—characterised as a 'skill ecosystem'. They write that 'while skills are not "the answer" there can be "no answer" without skills' (Buchanan et al. 2001, p.45).

Comyn (2002a, 2002b) offers an historical perspective of the place of generic skills in the wider VET policy discourse. He addresses the key competencies and links the development of the 'employability skills agenda' to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) work investigating generic skills and employability. He also discusses the DeSeCo (Definition and Selection of Competencies) project. In particular, Comyn addresses the debate within OECD circles about the attempts to determine, codify and implement indicators to inform international comparisons and investment decisions. He notes concerns about the narrowness of the assessment instruments and the exclusion of vital social and cultural factors in international comparisons. Despite such concerns he reports that:

> … many advocates of international generic skills indicators argued that empirically sound assessments could be developed that overcome the context specificity of skills … In doing so however they reinforced some of the perceived weaknesses of the current indicator projects, and excluded a place for teacher and student judgement. (Comyn 2002b, p.2)

Farrell (1996, 2001) argues that the International Standards Organisation (ISO) and similar systems have been established to shift the locus of authority from the local to the global. According to her analysis the forces of globalisation impact on education in multiple ways and demands for measurable generic skills can be seen as one expression of these impacts.

## Construction of identity and values

Buchanan et al. (2001) also argue that: 'Employer interest and investment in behavioural competencies has increased in relative importance compared to their interest and investment in cognitive and technical competencies'. They note that: 'Workers are increasingly expected to provide for the first two and to willingly accept selection and training based on the latter' (Buchanan et al. 2001, p.17). This finding tallies with the findings of the recently released Business Council of Australia and Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry report (Curtis & McKenzie 2001) highlighting the importance, to employers, of attitudinal factors, values and the behavioural skills of workers. It is clear that there is now a demand for the naming, and sometimes measuring, of a whole suit of values and/or attributes. Some skill sets include self-esteem, honesty, persistence and a positive attitude towards health and change (Leroux & Lafleur 1995) among employability 'skills'.

This raises concerns regarding the identification, teaching and measurement of such 'skills'. Payne (2000) concludes that: 'We have reached a point … where skill means whatever employers and policy makers want it to mean' (Payne 2000, p.361). He argues that if educators choose employers' definitions of skill, questions of inequality and discrimination may become critical, as the social construct of skills overlaps with attitudinal, behaviour and character traits which are embedded in the cultural capital of certain social groups. He notes the expectation for the training system to produce appropriately groomed graduates:

> Not only does this promise to cast the VET system in a new and unfamiliar role of speech training and personal grooming 'makeovers', but the fact that individuals may be expected to have their personal and class based identities re-engineered in this way raises major ethical concerns as well as the possibility of adverse psychological side effects for those whose self image now comes under closer scrutiny. (Payne 2000, p.363)

Willmott (1993) has similar concerns. He highlights the way employees' personal identity has been hijacked so that their values and attitudes are determined by corporations. Willmott argues that the current economic culture, which he calls 'corporate culturalism', threatens to undermine the social and intellectual infrastructure of democratic society because it demands that we relinquish critical assessment in favour of unfounded corporate loyalty. Saul develops a similar argument outlining his concerns about the ideology of corporatism 'that denies and undermines the legitimacy of the individual as the citizen in a democracy' (1997, p.191). Similarly, Sennett (1998) talks of the 'corrosion of character' created by the modern corporate culture of 'no long term'. He concludes that: 'Detachment and superficial cooperativeness are better armour for dealing with current realities than behaviour based on values of loyalty and service' (Sennett 1998, p.23).

Schofield (1999) highlights the importance of social, civic and community values in VET. She argues that VET as an institution has broader responsibilities than merely to employers and industry. Schofield comments upon the values necessary for the development of social capital and the maintenance of the 'social fabric' in these challenging 'New Times'. Citing Drucker, she argues that the communitarian and social values are in fact necessary for 'driving innovation and growth'. Thus she argues that even the 'new' economy needs these 'traditional' values. She also makes links to consideration of Indigenous values, learning and culture and to the research of Kilpatrick and Falk (1999) on community building and social capital.

Each of these researchers, in various ways, is contesting the discourse through which employer groups are attempting to formalise generic skills. In particular, these researchers are contesting the employers' notion of 'skill' itself which threatens to absorb 'personal' attitudes, values and character into its definition and which is increasingly taking hold within the dominant discourse.

The insights of discourse theory suggest how individuality—even identity itself—is shaped and constructed through the social processes of discourse. There is a well-established body of research literature which documents the relationship between discourse practices and identity formation. Coupland and Nussbaum in *Discourse and lifespan identity* (1993) present, in addition to their research on these issues, a rich series of papers exploring the multiple ways discourse shapes identity. In a different context Street (1992) discusses how the construction of identity is shaped by the social processes of language and literacy within particular communities. Particular discursive practices, he argues, 'are deeply implicated in the construction of self and person' (1992, p.42). Waterhouse's (1994, 1999) accounts of professional practice across a range of different contexts illuminate the construction of identity over time, through engagement with shifting patterns of professional discourse. McLaren and Lankshear (1993, p.407) argue that 'every individual consists of an ensemble of multiple shifting positions within discourses and social practices'. Cope and Kalantzis articulate a similar position: 'Just as there are multiple layers to everyone's identity, there are multiple discourses of identity and multiple discourses of recognition to be negotiated' (Cope & Kalantzis 1995, p.11).

Chappell (1999) discusses the multiple discourses shaping the work of technical and further education (TAFE) teachers. He explores the traditional discourses of 'work' and 'liberal education', and the more recently emergent discourses of 'new vocationalism' and 'economic rationalism'. He shows how the newer discourses have challenged established identities and constructed new professional identities for TAFE teachers. He notes that these processes are characterised by some degree of conflict, ambiguity and contradiction. Seddon (1994, 1997) has made similar observations on the basis of her studies. Falk (2002) also discusses issues of identity in relation to generic skills and 'the new world of work'. He argues that adapting to new or different workplaces and contexts requires important 'identity resources' and that:

> Learners also need to learn, re-learn and apply aspects of their identities … [to a new or different workplace context] … [There is] a great amount of identity re-learning and shifting for the transfer to 'being a worker' in a particular workplace. These identity changes are the hidden dimensions that make 'generic skills' appear as they are. These are the very



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> skills, the skills of identity change, that receive little explicit attention in education and training courses. (Falk 2002, p.8)

We see the same sorts of processes of construction and deconstruction of self, learning and re-learning of identity operating with the displaced workers who are participants in this study.

### Self-knowledge, emotional intelligence, resilience and self-efficacy

Stretching the focus from key competencies, to generic skills, and onto the concept of employability also highlights the fashionable concept of 'emotional intelligence'. Goleman (1996) builds on Gardner's (1985) theory of multiple intelligences but places particular importance on the place of emotions. He argues that self-awareness, impulse control, persistence, zeal and motivation, empathy and social deftness are all shaped by emotions. Exploring the psychology and the neuro-physiology of human behaviour, he argues that 'emotional intelligence is a master aptitude, a capacity that profoundly affects all other abilities, either facilitating or interfering with them' (Goleman 1996, p.80).

The Owen and Bound (2001) study of contractor alliances also highlights the importance of strong skills in self-efficacy, motivation, and self-knowledge. They emphasise 'the skill of resilience' and note that it was 'central to almost all of the participants interviewed'. However, they argue that:

> ... this attribute is unlikely to be obtained through a learning package or taught in a traditional classroom. If other studies support the conclusions that this and the other skills and attributes ... are both important and necessary in equipping Australians for the world of work, then what kinds of structural and pedagogical approaches best support the development of these skills? (Owen & Bound 2001, p.61)

Owen and Bound also note the importance of contractors possessing 'well-developed networking skills' and the capacity to think strategically and read the market to identify and exploit opportunities. The importance of communication skills, relationship-building skills and empathy for others' points of view were also stressed along with a call to recommence work on the earlier proposed key competency of 'cultural understanding'. They particularly note the significance of cultural understanding in relation to workplaces and organisational and workplace cultures.

## Issues of acquisition

Cornford (2001) argues that the policy-based conceptualisation of generic skills in Australia has serious limitations. He argues that:

> ... policy makers in Australia have viewed generic skills solely from the perspective of employers' needs and have not attempted to face the realities of effective learning and teaching issues. This has resulted in seriously distorted conceptions of the generic skills, very truncated research and consequently inefficient efforts to operationalise the teaching of generic skills to ensure that they produce effective learning according to their potential. (Cornford 2001, p.143)

He suggests that the 'critical role of teachers, trainers and the workplace context' has been largely ignored by policy-makers in the social engineering of key competencies. As a consequence there was 'no real recognition of what was required to operationalise the concepts into effective practice ... no real understanding of teaching or transfer issues' (Cornford 2001, p.144). He stresses the need to bring educators back into the picture and to reconceptualise generic skills in terms of learning and transfer. He notes also that the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training, which has become 'the defacto teaching/training requirement' 'is certainly not sufficient' to equip teachers for this important work. Dawe (2001) and Harris and Simons (1999) are amongst others who make similar observations.

Cornford's analysis is consistent with the view that there are, in effect, quite different discourses on generic skills. In the following sections we focus on a grounded conception of generic skills in action and highlight some of the educational issues associated with acquisition, transfer and assessment. As mentioned earlier, that conception sits within the 'practitioner discourse' about generic skills.

## Reconceptualising generic skills and competence

Hager (1999) cites Australian and overseas research on key competencies and generic skills to argue their importance to the process of making judgements. He suggests that effective implementation of the key competencies should focus on the development of learners' capacities for making judgements. Such a focus, he suggests, would:

> Serve to alleviate the traditional tensions between education and work, which are based on such dichotomous assumptions as general education vs vocational education, theory vs practice, and rationality vs emotions, values etc. (Hager 1999, p.1)

Rejecting such dichotomies, he argues that the key competencies are highly context-sensitive, that they cluster in actual work situations along with other more specific competencies, that they can be thought of as a process as well as an outcome, and that they develop throughout the lifespan. He stresses that: 'It is important that the acquisition of proficiency in the key competencies needs to be seen as a developmental process stretching over a substantial part of the lifespan' (Hager 1999, p.7). Hager also notes that the nature of these competencies is commonly misunderstood. There is, he says:

> A prevailing myth that key competencies are free floating entities that only need to be described and taught in isolation. On this erroneous view, key competencies take on a life of their own and people simply have to learn them in isolation and then transfer them to new situations. In reality the key competencies are more holistic. (Hager 1999, p.4)

He stresses the embedded nature of these competencies and the importance of educational strategies based on an integrated and holistic awareness of the competencies in context. The key competencies, he says 'point the way forward' for education directed to improving capacities to make effective judgements (Hager 1999, p.28).

Dawe (2001) reports on a study investigating generic skills in the context of Australian training packages. The study considered ten training packages and involved a deliberate search for models of 'good practice' in implementing generic skills. Dawe argues for more explicit identification of generic skills in the evidence guides for units of competence within training packages. However, she does not explicitly address the conundrum that the more explicit the criteria for evidence and assessment, then the less 'generic' the competencies become.

Sandberg (2000) argues that competence is not contained in lists of skills and attributes but in the way workers conceive of their work. While all workers may recognise the same end goal, the essence of higher-order expertise is contained in the way they construct their activities to get there. Higher-order competence is demonstrated, according to Sandberg, through increasingly sophisticated conceptions of the task, such that experts are able to interpret and construct the work in ways that cannot be comprehended by the novice.

Sandberg's understanding of competence poses significant challenges to orthodox thinking about competency and competency-based approaches to training and assessment. Sandberg's analysis suggests that much more attention should be given to trying to understand how the learner (or the novice) interprets, conceives or understands the task. Herein lies the key to moving the learner forward onto more sophisticated conceptions which in turn enable more sophisticated behaviours. Cornford and Bevan (1999) are similarly critical of the superficiality of conventional VET practice in developing competence. They note that the development of refined competence (proficiency) fails to attract any attention.

Gonczi (2002a) draws together threads from multi-disciplinary fields to argue that 'what is needed if we are to take seriously the development of key competencies in vocational and professional education is something of a revolution' (Gonczi 2002a, pp.20–1). His central thesis is that 'the way most people think about learning is wrong'. He also stresses the relational and contingent nature of key competencies and the importance of considering their development in context—within the communities of practice which give them meaning. He suggests that the key competencies:

> … do not exist without a context. So 'Problem Solving' or 'Collecting Analysing and Organising Information' for example, should not be thought of as discrete competencies … There is no such thing as the generic competency of problem solving—only individuals bringing together the appropriate attributes in a particular context to solve the specific problem that confronts them. Thus the key competencies are really no more than 'complex' competencies as defined in the integrated model of competence … the key competencies will never stand alone. (Gonczi 2002b, p.4)

He further suggests that 'it is dangerous to think of the key competencies as discrete and stand alone competencies' and that such approaches reflect 'the tendency for atomistic or reductionist thinking' (Gonczi 2002a, p.4). Gonczi calls for a new learning paradigm that takes account of the latest insights from research in neuroscience. He suggests that it is now clear that the traditional dichotomies about mind and body are false. What is called for is a new approach to learning that is more holistic, that takes account of affective, moral and physical, as well as cognitive, aspects of learning. He stresses that reasoning and emotion are vitally connected and that:

> learning is fused with work and with a changing identity … situated learning theory argues that transfer is the knowledge developed by acting and doing in a range of contexts or communities of practice, where each time the learner creates new knowledge. (Gonczi 2002b, p.12)

Gonczi's analysis also suggests the importance of the community of practice and the ways the community is 'willing to allow the learner to progressively become part of the core of their community'. He argues that educational understandings should appreciate humans as 'embodied creatures in an embedded world'.

Billett's (2001a, 2001b) recent work also suggests the importance of the learning context and notions of situated competence and embedded knowledge. He discusses the importance of the opportunities (affordances) that workplaces provide for learning and development. He reports the not-surprising finding that 'those learners afforded the richest opportunities for participation reported the strongest development'. His interest is in the dual consideration of the invitations or affordances provided by the workplace and in how individuals elect to engage with the opportunities presented. The study included not only formal or structured learning arrangements, but also the less formal learning realised through day-to-day activities.

## Assumptions about 'transferability'

Assumptions about the transferability of generic skills depend upon the discourse within which the discussion is taking place. Within the 'autonomous' discourse of policy discussed above, the transferability of generic skills is readily assumed. However, when we move to a focus on teaching and learning and the actual competencies required in a given context, then issues of transferability become more problematic. Hager (1999) notes that the metaphor of transfer is commonly misunderstood:

> Rather than being viewed as discrete skills that people learn to transfer, the key competencies should be seen as learnt capacities to handle an increasing variety of diverse situations. Thus transfer becomes more a growth in confidence and adaptability … To put it another way, perhaps it is not so much the key competencies that transfer, as a growing understanding of how to deal with different contexts. (Hager 1999, p.7)

When the highly relational, contextual and situated nature of these competencies in practice is better understood, we find we need new metaphors to better appreciate what is involved in processes of 'transfer'. Marginson noted in 1995 that one of the weaknesses in prevailing conceptions of competency training was the assumption of 'automatic' transferability of competence from one context to another. He stressed that the acquisition of competence is domain-specific:

> This point about domain specificity applies to the generic skills such as problem solving and learning how to learn. They are built in specific contexts and may or may not transfer into other contexts … the conception of competence or skill—or knowledge—as readily transferable leads to neglect of this important aspect, skill of transfer itself.
>
> (Marginson 1995, p.108)

The skills of transfer he argues:

> … include an awareness of the context, the capacity to move between different viewpoints, languages and systems of knowledge (which produces flexibility), self reflection (which encourages adaptability), self regulation, and learning how to learn.
>
> (Marginson 1995, p.112)

Falk (2002) and Falk and Guenther (2002) also highlight the assumptions underpinning beliefs about the transferability of generic skills. Falk notes:

> … the research shows that there are, in fact, no such things as generic skills that operate across contexts independently of those contexts … The myth of generic and transferable skills remains just that—a myth built on naïve perceptions that desired qualities of a person's character, such as 'communication skills' are transferable from one context to another regardless of contextual knowledge. (Falk 2002, pp.8–11)

## Packing, unpacking and repacking

Down (2001) also stresses the active nature of learning for transfer and the importance of contextual knowledge. Her theoretical framework for understanding generic skills 'integrates concepts from activity theory (Engestrom 1999), expansive learning (Bateson 1972), communities of practice (Billett 1998) and multiple intelligences (Gardner 1999)'. Down suggests:

> We need to shift our focus away from the provision of information to the facilitation of the learner's ability to unpack and re-pack, analyse and synthesise, or deconstruct and reconstruct his/her current learnings against existing understandings within multiple frameworks, in a different configuration. (Down 2001, p.6)

The emphasis here is that the 'transfer' process is neither automatic nor passive. Such views are also supported by Golding, Marginson and Pascoe's (1996) study and the review of the literature on transfer by Misko (1995).

## Experiential learning and ownership

Waterhouse (1999) conducted a study of lifelong, experiential learning and professional development in the context of adult and vocational education. His analysis stresses the complex, relational and embedded nature of experiential learning and the importance of identification and 'ownership' in learning. He highlights the idea that neither teaching nor life–work experiences, in themselves, are sufficient to ensure meaningful learning:

> Whilst learning is constructed and shaped socially and culturally, it is also profoundly personal and at times idiosyncratic. For learning to be meaningful it must be 'owned' by the learner. S/he must come to identify with and claim that which is being presented or experienced … This identification must be active … It entails recognition of self in a different context; or recognising different aspects of self within a given context … Each

> individual must recognise, identify and claim ownership of that which is being learned. No one else can do this for the learner. (Waterhouse 1999, pp.294–5)

He also notes that experiential learning is not bound by timetables or delivery schedules and that significant learning can be painful:

> The processes of identification and ownership which are fundamental to transformative learning may require painful un-making of self. Experiential learning can have a dark side. Unmediated experiential learning may erode self esteem and damage confidence … [It can be] … fraught with trauma and discomfort. It also seems likely that whilst the learning may be unconscious, the difficult unlearning requires some deliberate and conscious attention. (Waterhouse 1999, pp.296–7)

This dimension of the learning experience is under-researched. Merriam, Mott and Lee (1996, p.3) report that: 'There is virtually no discussion about the learning process that results in regressive, growth-inhibiting outcomes'. Keane's (1987) discussion of the 'doubting journey' captures some sense of the personal anxiety and discomfort which may permeate significant experiential learning. According to Keane's analysis, learning involves doubting, the greater the learning, the greater the disorientation and doubt. He suggests the process involves 'mourning and letting go' (1987, p.96). Turbill (1993) also stresses the importance of doubt and tolerance for discomfort in the learning process. These authors, in various ways, highlight the significance of the uncomfortable side of experiential learning. These findings also resonate with earlier comments about the effect of discursive shifts shaping identity through personal experience.

These observations have relevance for older/displaced workers considering the meaning of their working lives, the transferability of their skills and the need to 'reconstruct' themselves as viable players in the 'new economy'. Experiential learning 'at its most profound … does more than change our thinking, it involves the re-shaping of our personal constructs, the re-making of our very selves' (Waterhouse 1999, p.324).

Focussing on the generic skills identified as important by the contractors in their study, Owen and Bound (2001) also noted the importance of metacognitive and 'learning to learn' skills. These skills are essential when people need to transfer and recontextualise their learning because of a change of situation, circumstances or context. They cite Moy (1999) and note that:

> … this competency involves explicit and conscious application of learning strategies and related cognitive processes involved in extracting meaning and transferring it to other settings … the contractors participating in this study all had well-developed capacities to transfer meaning from one particular context and to apply it to another. (Owen & Bound 2001, p.60)

Collectively, these studies suggest the importance of these so-called 'meta-learning' skills as an aid to transferability and the role of identity formation as a part of that process.

## Questions about assessment

The literature on assessment is plagued by the same (often unstated) duality that has already been highlighted. Is the focus to be upon assessment of 'autonomous' competencies for the purposes of policy development, implementation or evaluation? Is assessment to supply data to inform funding allocations or international comparisons? Is assessment to inform teaching processes, or the design of learning experiences? Is it to determine, or verify, individuals' capacities to perform particular tasks in particular contexts? The different purposes reflect the way in which 'generic skills' are conceived within different discourses. The different purposes have profound implications for assessment.

The issue of multiple and conflicting agendas for assessment is often lost in debates that are premised upon simplistic 'commonsense' understandings of generic skills. Such understandings see them as 'free-floating' (Hager 1999) 'autonomous' (Street 1984, 1988) and straightforward.

Gonczi (2002a) puts the counter-argument succinctly. The key competencies are holistic and integrated aspects of the way individuals engage with their worlds.

> The only way in which they can be assessed is through authentic direct performance assessments in particular contexts where evidence is gathered and judgements made (as say in a court of law) on the basis of this evidence. (Gonczi 2002a, p.20)

A critical point is Gonczi's assertion that competence is not directly observable but may be inferred from performance: 'While performance of activities/tasks can be observed, the attributes that underlined the performance are necessarily inferred' (Gonczi 2002a, p.3).

Collectively, these researchers suggest the holistic, embedded and interrelated nature of generic competencies in action. They also suggest the need for pedagogies designed to help learners identify, appreciate, articulate and develop these competencies in practice, within their own meaningful contexts.

This study sits astride different (yet related) understandings of generic skills within VET policy and practice. Confusion in real-world practice and policy can arise when the two understandings slip between each other and are used interchangeably. In discussion about assessment the slippage is particularly observable. A contextualised assessment may demonstrate an employee's capacity to communicate effectively in a large company where systems are defined and relationships formalised. Does this mean that the employee has achieved the generic competence of communication, and is it the same competency sought within a small business where relationships are informal and systems are less defined?

However, the policy and practice understandings are not entirely separate. There are policy-makers, administrators and bureaucrats with an interest in teaching and learning practices. There are practitioners interested and involved in policy, management and systems development. There are researchers and practitioner–researchers working across these domains. This study aims to contribute to and inform the policy discourse. As such we are obliged to speak at times of generic skills as abstract concepts embedded in policies about training and employability. For the most part, however, this study aims to illuminate the educational issues of acquisition, development and 'transferability' of generic skills. To better understand these issues we need to consider these skills in context and to appreciate the complexity and the subtlety of the holistic and relational ways they are developed and manifested in practice.

# Research method

This study was essentially qualitative in nature, although the collection of some quantitative data was included in the research design. This section briefly describes the way the research was conducted. A fuller discussion of the research design, and membership of the project reference committee, is contained in appendix B (volume 2).

## Research questions

The primary focus for the study was the perceptions, use and learning of generic skills by redundant, displaced or retrenched workers. The interrelated research questions which guided the study were:

- How are generic skills perceived and understood by displaced workers?
- How have working people developed generic skills?
- How has work contributed to the development of generic skills?
- How were generic skills reconstructed at work?
- How do generic skills transfer to a new context?
- How can VET practitioners and enterprises foster the development of generic skills?
- How can the VET system best assist the development of generic skills for the new workforce?
- What means of assessment can best represent generic skills for experienced workers?
- What is the relationship between generic skills and employability?

## Research design

Three levels of data collection were utilised: focus group discussions followed by the individual completion of a survey questionnaire and in-depth interviews with some of the participants. Where it was not possible to conduct a focus group, an individual discussion was conducted prior to the completion of the survey form and the interview. In the latter case, the survey questionnaire served as the basis of the interview and was completed by the interviewer.

### Focus groups

The focus groups were used to discuss the notion of generic skills, making use of Field's 'workplace skills iceberg' (Field 1991, p.31) which provided the metaphor of submerged or hidden skills that underpin the task skills observable in workplaces. As the groups consisted of experienced workers they readily identified with Field's 'work environment', 'work organisation', 'workplace learning' and 'contingency management' categorisation of these skills. They were able to give examples, discuss these concepts and to describe their experiences in relation to this model. A set of questions for focus groups was developed to initiate discussion and to act as

prompts if necessary, depending on the direction of the general discussion. These questions were:

- What do you think are the general or 'generic' skills and personal attributes that you have developed throughout your working lives? (How would you describe them?)
- In what ways have the various experiences, activities and challenges experienced throughout your working lives contributed to the development of those general skills and attributes? Can you give some examples?
- In what ways has your work changed over the years and in what way has this changed the general skills that you need?
- To what extent do you think your general skills are desired or valued by potential employers?
- What sorts of skills and attributes do you think employers are looking for now? (What do you think are the new skill requirements for the current job market?)

Before asking participants to complete the survey questionnaire, the list of ten skill areas contained in the survey was introduced to participants as another way of naming the same sorts of skills, and it was explained that they were broadly representative of the skills they had identified. However, participants were invited to nominate skills which were not identified in the list if they felt they were significant. It was found that participants readily identified with the notion of generic skills as represented in the list used in the survey form.

## Survey questionnaire

In order to gain some quantitative data from the survey it was necessary to name a list of generic skills around which to frame some questions. The research team found that lists of generic skills and skills for employability abound (Kearns 2001). The first draft of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia report (Curtis & McKenzie 2001) was published during the conduct of this project, giving yet another list of 'employability' skills, although differing in some aspects from previous lists. As noted in this report, each enterprise/employer will change the emphasis and include some skill requirements rather than others (Curtis & McKenzie 2001, pp.48–52), giving evidence to our observation that generic skills do not represent a discrete set of skills. The research team believed that it was not the business of this project to create yet another 'list' to add to the debate. Thus, although a specific list was developed for the purposes of the survey, it was used as the basis for discussion, as a starting point rather than as an end in itself in order to develop a shared understanding of the concept of generic skills in the minds of the participants. Discussion did not therefore centre necessarily on the list provided, but allowed for different views of these skills to emerge through focus group discussions and interviews.

The list was broadly based on the key competencies, with 'communication skills' covering two areas of the key competencies to allow addition of other areas of 'cultural understanding', 'understanding/designing systems', 'adapting to change' and 'creative and innovative' skills. These were gleaned from the literature and research reports and the experience of the research team in workplace education. They were never expected to be a comprehensive list, merely a starting point that would stimulate some useful insights from participants. The survey aimed to encourage respondents to reflect upon their own acquisition, development and use of generic skills.

The survey instrument was developed by the research team and critiqued by the reference committee. (See appendix E for a copy of the survey questionnaire.) A trial was conducted to determine usability and to anticipate difficulties of interpretation or recording.

### Interviews

The one-to-one interviews provided an opportunity for participants to describe their experiences in more detail. The interviews, with the researchers as the primary research 'instruments' (Caulley 1994), allowed for dialogue and responsiveness. The researchers sought clarification or elaboration on responses to survey questions that were of particular interest. A list of key questions was developed to be used at the discretion of the interviewer and as prompts if needed. These were:

- What sort of work are you seeking?
- Is this a different area of work from that of your previous job? (If 'yes': What new general skills will it require compared to your previous areas of work? If 'no': In what ways has the work changed since you started working? What new skills are required?)
- What sort of things will you have to learn if you get the work you are seeking? How do you think you will get these skills?
- What do you consider your most relevant skills and attributes for getting another job?
- How readily do you think your current skills and attributes would transfer to a new job situation?
- What barriers do you face in getting the sort of job you want?

These questions were modified for participants who were already re-employed:

- What sort of work are you doing now compared to what you were doing before?
- What different skills did you have to learn for your most recent job?
- Which were the skills that were the most useful (transferable) in your new job? (How well have your skills transferred to the new work situation?)
- What different general skills did you need?

It was expected that discussion would flow readily and that the questions would only be used within the context of the general flow of discussion. The interviews enabled the researchers to capture the respondents' stories and explanations in full (rather than in abbreviated or annotated form on the survey). This enabled more detailed analysis of the respondents' images, metaphors and ways of naming and understanding generic skills. The personal conversations allowed for sensitive discussion of issues such as employability, career/life choices and personal/professional development. The research team utilised responses from early interviews to develop and deepen their field of enquiry and to follow interesting threads that emerged. Interviews were conducted face to face and audio recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis.

## Data collection

The 127 displaced workers who took part in the study were drawn from Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and regional Victoria. The sample represented a broad cross-section of the workforce in terms of job categories (see table 13, appendix C). Most participants (80%) had undertaken some form of post-school education and training or re-training in order to maintain or obtain employment (see tables 6 and 7, appendix C). A total of 13 focus groups and 53 interviews were conducted (see table 1).

In addition, four employment placement officers, two union-based employment support officers, the chief executive officer of an employment agency and a human resources manager were interviewed and two small focus groups were conducted with employment placement officers and teachers facilitating training for unemployed workers respectively.

**Table 1: Area of sample**

| Area of sample | Displaced workers | Interviews | Focus groups |
|---|---|---|---|
| Metropolitan Melbourne | 63 | 18 | 9 |
| Regional Victoria | 18 | 13 | 2 |
| Adelaide | 12 | 2 | 1 |
| Brisbane | 13 | 13 | 0 |
| New South Wales | 21 | 7 | 1 |
| **Totals** | **127** | **53** | **13** |

## Composition of the sample

Full details of the results of the survey questionnaire are contained in appendix C. A brief summary of the composition of the sample follows.

The sample comprised 39.4% females, 60.6% males, with 70.9% being born in Australia, 91.1% claiming English as their first language and 30 individuals speaking languages other than English.

The ages of participants ranged widely, with a small number in the 16–20 age group (2.4%), and a few who were over 65 years of age (4.7%), with the average age being 46.6 years. The majority (75.6%) of participants were over 40 years of age.

The 127 displaced workers who were participants in this study had between them occupied over 500 positions and undertaken nearly 300 post-school training programs. Employment ranged from process workers to airline pilots, from farmers to teachers, from tradespeople to engineers, architects and computer programmers, from administration assistants to accountants and managers, and from construction workers and shop assistants to funeral directors, landscape gardeners and self-employed businesspeople. Many had been displaced from the workforce more than once in their working life. Full details of employment details are contained in table 13, appendix C.

The majority of participants had undertaken post-compulsory schooling, with 64.4% completing Years 11 or 12; only 9.4% left before completing Year 10. The average school leaving age was 16.6 years, with 22% leaving before they were 16 years and none leaving school before they were 14. Most participants (79.5%) had completed some form of post-school formal education and training program, with 43.3% listing three or more courses. The majority of courses cited were in-house training programs (41.4%), with VET programs (29.3%) and university courses (20.2%) making up most of the balance. (See table 7, appendix C.) Many of these training programs were completed recently, with 52% completing a program in 2000 or later and a further 22.7% completing between 1995 and 1999. Only 12.4% had completed their last course prior to 1980. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that many courses were related to changes to laws on occupational health and safety, licensing arrangements for work previously learned simply on the job, the need to re-train following retrenchment from some industries, and policies regarding employment agencies sending people for re-training.

# Results

The results of the study are examined in this section under the following headings, which encapsulate the intention of the research questions:

- Perceptions and understandings of generic skills by displaced workers
- How generic skills were developed by working people
- The contribution of work to developing generic skills
- The reconstruction of generic skills at work
- Transferability of generic skills
- Issues relating to employment and employability

Further research questions are concerned with feedback to the stakeholders in the VET system and wider implications of the study for policy and practice. These questions are addressed in the following section: Issues and implications.

## Perceptions and understandings of generic skills

Most of the participants in this project readily identified with the notion of generic skills but they described them in quite different ways, reflecting different life and work contexts. Many had not thought about or heard of 'generic skills' previously but understood them as an intrinsic part of their personhood and identity—skills which have developed progressively through a multiplicity of experiences and which have become 'embedded' and therefore often 'unconscious' aspects of a person's behaviour. Generic skills were commonly identified as 'skills of life'. As one participant noted:

> It's all part of growing up. As I said, we've come through the process of organising our family, it's all part of growing up ourselves, it comes through the teaching of your parents … it's not actually under any heading. Basically a lot of those things … are probably 'skills of life' is one way of looking at it.

Another participant commented:

> You don't really realise, cos you don't consider them skills even if they are, they're just generic, day to day … [However] the better you are at those skills the better you deal with different things in different circumstances.

In almost all cases, the participants in this project responded positively as they identified their own generic skills in the light of the framework that was presented to them. There was a sense in which this process, and the notion of generic skills itself, empowered them in that it provided a language with which their 'deep' or 'hidden' skills could be acknowledged and celebrated. Those skills were often seen as the outcome of years of struggle and personal commitment:

> Yeah, I've always been hard working and very committed and I love using my range of skills and I've worked very hard to develop them … and you know I'm just about in tears because they're so important.

> … they're your personal skills, your friendliness, your approachability … I think that's really important and also to do with you as a person … skills like being responsible. Responsibility is a really important factor and reliability …

Another participant understood them as skills that have become 'automated':

> I can guarantee there are lots of people in the [company name] system now, if you asked them to talk about what they did they would give you a really poor description of what they did because in life you automate a lot of things. When you drive a car you don't think about driving, you think about potential hazards but you automate everything else, like the gear change and all that kind of stuff, cos it's automated. When you've been in the job for a long time, you automate a lot of what you do.

These lay or commonsense understandings demonstrate the embedded nature of what we call 'generic skills' and the multiplicity of meanings that can therefore be attributed to them. They do not represent a discrete set of skills and many slip outside recognised definitions of skill. Hence there are inherent difficulties in attempts to define, measure or assess them as abstract entities separated from life and working contexts.

## Generic skills at work—relational and systemic

In the work context, generic skills were identified as necessary for workers to balance priorities, make appropriate judgements, synchronise activities and produce a quality outcome within the framework of the company goals. As Bill, a telecommunications supervisor, explained:

> In order to do a job properly, quickly … you've got to be able to … liaise with either customers or project officers or managers and … ensure that what we're providing them is to the letter of the law without providing them any more than they've asked for that, at the same time … we're working in smaller and smaller teams … the resources are getting tighter and tighter. If we're supervising staff, we've got to be able … to convey, communicate what you expect of each and every member of the team so that they carry out [the work] without … requiring any of the work to be reworked and at the same time, you … listen to them. And quite often a bloke might say, 'Look I haven't got the skills, I don't feel comfortable doing … a particular job because I haven't been trained for it' and you'd say 'Oh alright'. In this sort of environment there's a certain amount of on-the-job training, so you … spend time with them … it is very important to … think about what you're saying prior to ensure the information that you're giving is concise and in a very clear understandable manner knowing that if you go away, they can … comfortably and competently perform the task that you've assigned them.

This description exemplifies Gonczi's (2002b) understanding of generic skills, which he describes as relational, 'bringing together attributes possessed by individuals, and the contexts in which, through performance, these attributes are demonstrated … they do not exist without a context' (Gonczi 2002b, p.4). In concrete situations the 'generic' and the 'technical' are inseparably adjusted and reshaped for each situation. They are, however, intrinsic to this supervisor's competence because 'the capacity to perform specific activities will always entail some combination of knowledge/skills/disposition/values which when analysed almost always look like some combination of key competencies' (Gonczi 2002b, p.3).

In reflecting about his generic skills, Robert commented on what he learnt when going for his private pilot's licence at age 16:

> … with the pilot's licence I think you understand like they teach you a lot about the systems when you are flying an aeroplane—this is how it works, this is the system, this is the way to cross-reference problems—but also what it taught me was that when you sat in the seat of the aeroplane and you're about to start the engine everything becomes so serious. It's serious business, it's not something you can play with—although I did when I got off the ground and got up in the air. That was my turn then, I could play. But when you are on the


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> ground and you have a system to go through that's what they taught me that things can be very serious and you must respect them. If you don't you know somebody else will get hurt.

While this is not strictly a work-based example, Robert's engagement with systems and their application to problem-solving make his activity work-like. The generic skills he calls upon are vastly different from those of Bill, the telecommunications supervisor cited earlier. Robert also named what could be termed a 'meta-skill' related to the understanding of the 'serious business' that they represented in practice. His ability to exercise judgement and distinguish between those times when systems took priority, from those when he could play, is a significant feature of Robert as he matured into a capable pilot.

Robert and Bill provide examples of participants talking about their competence with reference to what might be termed meta-skills. Such skills provide the interconnectedness between the generic skills as listed in the survey. However, they shape the skills for their own context and introduce others that were not listed.

## Diverse interpretations

The diversity of perceptions of what 'generic skills' meant as a concept was mirrored in the participants' responses in relation to the list of skills that were contained in the survey.

The following three people talked about communication skills in quite different ways, yet all are completely valid in the contexts to which they are referring. These different interpretations of 'communications' are all at a higher level of complexity and specificity than the official definition of communication skills in the key competencies. They demonstrate that, except at the most basic and simplistic level, the skill of communication is best understood as being expressed in different contexts in diverse ways, reflecting the nature of each context, the attributes of the individual and the purposes of each communication.

Janine (in the context of airline cabin crew) talks about communication skills as personal attributes and values: of patience, understanding and commitment:

> It makes me realise, communication skills—what does it mean? … you've got to have patience, you have got to have understanding and commitment, but you have to be committed to that person, whether it be for a minute or for hours.

Fred sees communication skills in terms of keeping up with the times, of communicating in ways that reflect changing times and changing attitudes of younger people:

> … even like communication skills. Ok you've got communication skills but when you deal with people—because time has changed [there are] different views, different manners, different ways of doing it … even the youngsters are different now, their attitudes are different. Not that they're wrong because society has changed. So you have do it differently … you've got to learn to understand what the situation is now.

James sees good communication (in the context of business consultancy) as communication which is in a sense invisible, that has an impact in terms of bringing about the desired results within organisations, but does not draw attention to itself:

> … the most effective thing I can do is communicate what users are expected to do or what the system does or how it works and to do that in a way that people can comprehend … A really good piece of work that I might do is like a really good umpire in a sporting match. A really good umpire isn't even noticed … people see the teams, they see the scores, they see the excitement of the crowd … but a really good umpire just keeps the game flowing, makes the appropriate decisions. But if the umpire has done a good job, you can't even remember what the umpire's name was or one single decision they made.

Understood in this way, 'communication' overlaps significantly with other generic skills such as 'working in teams', 'problem-solving', 'cultural understanding', 'understanding systems', 'planning

and organising'. Boundaries are porous and definitions blurred and interpreted within the individual contexts.

'Communication' is often used as a catch-all category which may include the ability to analyse, reflect on and identify phenomena. Competence in these related areas is sometimes attributed to the years of experience and learning that older workers have gathered and is the fruit of their working life. As one participant, now self-employed, expressed it:

> I think every skill I've ever developed really was needed for the business, certainly understanding that different people want different things you know and everything—from sales reps … that want to sell you stuff that just isn't going to work—a lot of this sort of ability to handle these types of people … The ability to be able to speak to people straight up, tell them exactly what I wanted without fear of offending them, the ability to go off and get things organised and also understanding that these people, whoever they are—and in the business we are dealing with councillors sometimes, we're dealing with different companies, we're dealing with all sorts of people—understanding their motives and what they want to do.

While participants made sense of each of the categories on the list, they spoke about their skills in holistic terms and in the context of their work. As Gonczi (2002b) notes, competence across a range of skills can be inferred from particular experiences and performances to more general categories and applications.

## Reading the culture—understanding the systems

There is no one way in which generic skills are demonstrated. There are only individuals within contexts and 'communities of practice' (Lave 1990) where appropriate knowledge and experience is called upon which results in successful outcomes. Knowing when to apply what skill and in what measure is the result of highly developed generic skills in particular work environments. Anna's understanding of office environments and systems allowed her to 'read' particular workplaces:

> Ok what I found is first of all is you had to be able to adapt to the culture of the workplace where you were, and of course there's nothing really ever written down, so you can't be prepared for that. So you have to be able to walk into the place and to be able to very quickly assess what you see and what you feel and then be able to work out in your head how you think the whole place is working and then adapt yourself to fit in with that particular culture because each workplace is so different.

Anna has developed a capacity to read the systems of the workplace to interpret their expectations of her and to find a way in which she can contribute. Knowing how much initiative to take, when and how to promote oneself, and knowing when to suggest an innovation and when to submit to the system is the 'nous' that many experienced workers have learned. A 'community of practice' (Lave 1990) has been established at each work environment. Recognising both how to fit into it and how to use it is an important generic skill.

In another context, a placement officer explains the invisible boundaries around problem-solving skills for production workers.

> If you are working a machine and the thing stops, they would like somebody who has got enough savvy to look at it and think 'Oh it's stopped. Why has it stopped? Could it be this? Or that?' Something fairly basic. Yes, rather than just look around and say to the boss 'The machine stopped' and he says, 'Well have you pressed this lever or have you taken that lump of wool out of there?'—that's the level of the problem-solving. You're not given, and I've not ever seen any evidence of your basic levels [of employees] being given the freedom or the room to be more creative than that. They don't want you to just be a robot but a little bit of thinking like 'Why could it have stopped? Could it be this?', rather than [just] 'It stopped'. They don't want any more than that.

Bob, a farmer, maintained that being able to turn your hand to anything and teaching yourself the skills you needed was essential to running a farm, but when employed as a trades assistant he noted, 'the bosses hated you being innovative'. James, a management consultant, was acutely aware of the need to understand the systems that operate and to develop cultural sensibility. What is right in one place, may not be right in another:

> So all right, so there's environmental and organisational sensitivity. What does the organisation do, how does it work, where's the real power? You know, like they might often ask you to come along and do one thing but really they want something else.

Understanding yourself and the organisational structures, aspirations and capacities is the result of highly developed generic skills. It is the skill to understand how to 'fit in' which allows employees to find an identity for themselves within the work role: 'It's almost like an actor's role. You can step into the role, play the part, step out of the role and go home'.

Input from our participants suggested a notion of generic skills as essential invisible skills which are pertinent to different contexts and fundamental to competent performance. They are a fluid set of skills and attributes—each workplace, work position, life situation—seeking different combinations in different measures. While these skills can be grouped under broad headings, there is no single definition that separates them. Many of those discussed by our participants are not acknowledged on any list. They make sense holistically and in relation to their context. Thus the development and assessment of these skills also entails particular and context-sensitive processes.

## How generic skills were developed

The data indicate that pathways to gaining generic skills are as diverse as people's individual life and work histories. Informants spoke about childhood experience, parenting, hardship and everyday activity as having delivered important learning. It would appear that experience in the formative years placed people differently in their capacity to learn and change. While most participants saw their skills as developing throughout their life, work predominated as the most significant formational environment. The lived experience and reflections of the older workers in this study revealed the interactions between work contexts, perceptions of work (Sandberg 2000) and issues of personal and social identities (Gonczi 2002b; Waterhouse 1999) on the development of their generic skills.

### Community and family life

Many participants (52.1%) believed that home and community comprised one source of their skill development and 11.5% saw this area as the main source of their skills. Several participants named bringing up children as the main source of their planning and organising skills. As one expressed it:

> … you've still got to get meals done on time, you've still got to get the washing done … As anyone knows who's got children, it doesn't just happen. You've got to be there and time everything. So there's skills that you don't actually recognise as skills because you're adding to them and doing them and juggling them the whole time.

Some people had been quite methodical in seeking out learning experiences and targeting particular skills through community activities to build generic skills they thought they needed for work. One went in search of people skills and talked about learning social skills from ballroom dancing, and coping skills from his study of psychology, which also assisted him to manage others. One attended Rostrum to develop confidence and public-speaking skills. Some people spoke about sport in developing team skills. One man volunteered to coach a youth hockey team to develop his leadership skills. Another man set himself the task of catering for a motor cycle club weekend to develop his organisational skills.

A few participants (1.9%) nominated 'other' as the main source of their skill development and 7.4% nominated this category as one source of their skills. Some of the areas specified under this heading were related to peer group activities, hobbies and interests; another participant was a union representative and yet another one lay preacher who prepared and delivered sermons at his local church. Some of these could be interpreted as community activities; others were associated with work, both paid and unpaid. This blurring across categories was common.

## Experience/self-taught

Many participants believed that their generic skills were learned from experience and were self-taught, with 22% nominating this as the most important source of their skill development and 70.7% stating that it was one source of their skills. This was second only to work in the judgment of the participants, with 78.6% stating that they had taught themselves things they needed to know for work. Many of those who talked about developing their skills from experience were talking of experience that came from their work and the learning they absorbed from these experiences. For instance, Ben was always looking for opportunities to extend his basic skills:

> Through my own enthusiasm I walked through the factory because I didn't know where that pin belonged on the item we'd been building. I researched and found out where it went into the machine. So I developed an idea of what my actual job was. Even though it was only a small pin, it was part of a bigger, larger, product. But the workplace didn't associate that I wanted to know that, or didn't give me the opportunity. I had to use my own nous.

Ben used his 'nous' to learn what he wanted to know, demonstrating the ability to 'learn how to learn' as an important generic skill and in doing so illustrated an observation by Waterhouse (1999, p.295): 'It's not about the happening, it's about what you make of it …' This example also highlights the importance of holistic and systemic thinking as essential generic skills.

## Schooling—the foundation

The majority of participants had undertaken post-compulsory schooling, with 64.6% completing Years 11 or 12 and only 9.4% leaving before completing Year 10. The average school-leaving age was 16.6 years, with 22% leaving before they were 16 years of age and none leaving before they were 14. Evidence from the survey indicates that participants believed that, taken as a whole, their generic skills were developed primarily at work (53.4%), by teaching themselves from experience (22%) or in the home or through community activities (11.5%). Only 5% nominated their schooling as the most important source of their generic skills. However, when asked to list all the sources of their skills, the evolving nature of skill development came to the fore with 48.8% naming their formal schooling as one source of their communication skills and 67.2% nominating school as one source of their mathematical skills and understandings. Although the number of younger participants was too low to gather any statistically significant data, there is a close correlation between the responses from this group and their age, with the younger people relating more closely to their school learning. This would suggest that time since schooling was a factor in the responses.

One participant saw school as one source of his skills but qualified this in light of later experience: 'once you leave school ... you become responsible for other people, whereas at school you're not responsible for other people'.

Another taught himself the fitting and machining skills he needed for his work and, although he listed no formal post-school courses, he achieved a 98% pass in the final craft exam for apprentices when sent to get a qualification by his employer so that he could be paid as an 'engineer–mechanic'. When asked how he taught himself these skills he maintained that the basis of his skill development came from his training at a technical school. From this fundamental training (for example, in fitting and machining, science, mathematical concepts, clear thinking and communicating), he was able to teach himself his trade skills and learn from experience. He

also cited history and geography and other subjects as an important foundation for his learning for life.

## Post-school training

Most participants (79.5%) had completed some form of post-school formal education and training program, with 43.3% listing three or more courses. Many of these were completed recently, with 52% completing a program in 2000 or later and a further 22.7% completing between 1995 and 1999. Only 12.4% had completed their last course prior to 1980. The majority of courses cited were in-house training programs (41.4%), with VET courses (29.3%) and university courses (20.2%) making up most of the balance. Many in-house training programs acquired prior to 1980 would be classified as VET courses today. Indeed there was a tendency for participants to blur the distinction between in-house and formal training in their apprenticeship and technician cadetship training, some identifying with the schooling at TAFE and others identifying with the mentoring and on-the-job training at work. Apart from these longer technician and apprentice training programs that were nominated as being completed 'in-house', most in-house training consisted of shorter programs while the VET and university courses were of much longer duration. When asked about the relevance of each formal course to their current employability, 58% believed that the generic skills they had acquired were still relevant even if the technical skills they had learned had been superseded.

Only 6.3% nominated formal post-school training and education as the most important source of their generic skills across all the skill areas, with a range of 0.9% believing that cultural understanding and 19.4% believing that their skills in using technology were developed in the context of formal education. However, 27.2% named such courses as one source of their skill development.

### *Apprentice and technician training*

Apprenticeship and technician cadetships offer clear models of experiential learning when applied to technical skills. However, the integration of the more interpretive generic skills is subtle and more abstract. When reflecting on the relevance of his apprenticeship training to his current level of generic skills, Robert acknowledged that his apprentice years represented the beginning of his learning to communicate with older workers, plan and organise work activities, and so on. However, he also gave a thoughtful assessment of the main learning that he believed came from those years:

> I think the important thing in doing my apprenticeship is that you learn the skill to learn from others and then, as I said, as you get on you learn to hand those skills back. And you learn to deal with people who are less skilled than you and you progressively develop this ability to allocate jobs very slowly and … to be able to get jobs done.

Robert saw his apprenticeship as a time when he started to become aware of himself as a competent person who had acquired significant skills that he could now hand on to others. Through his apprenticeship he had found his way into new work roles as tradesman and teacher of novices. Part of his proficiency was his ability to build upon his experience and know what and when to apply his learning. As he adopted new work roles, he changed his stance in relation to his work, moving from 'he who follows the master' to 'he who is the master'. The end goals were not as sharply defined and the level of integration into his stance demanded reconceptualisation of his competence (Sandberg 2000) and a personal ownership of the learning (Waterhouse 1999, pp.294–5).

### *Workplace training*

This study has not set out to investigate the ways in which learning has been managed by workplaces. However, some participants acknowledged the important role that the workplace has played in providing learning opportunities. Some workplaces appear to be attuned to the dynamics of learning and recognise the community of practice as the heart of workplace culture, integral to the formation of workplace identity. Such workplaces offer formal and informal learning opportunities which provide the infrastructure to mediate learning. Others appear to be less sensitive and responsive to these issues.

Some workplaces provided in-house courses promoting 'communication' and 'leadership' in shaping workplace identity and expertise. Thus new behaviours and values become integrated into the expectations of the workplace.

> A lot of stuff you did within [company x] was very, very good. We did things like the leadership program … They wanted you to communicate and deal with people … I don't know that it actually gave you any skills, it gave you more of an understanding of what they expected of you.

Participants reported that formal courses were most valuable when they were closely related to the context where they were already applying the skills. Fay explained how her friend Janice was sent off 'kicking and screaming' to a formal quality assurance course which held little application possibility for her: '… the keen factor was zero and given the opportunity she wouldn't have done it … She learned some stuff, she didn't value it highly'.

Janice therefore dismissed the learning as irrelevant. Fay, however, found her negotiation course particularly valuable because of her professed need to adjust her work identity in her current work role. The point of application for her learning was near at hand:

> … but when I went into my last role, and was dealing a lot more with the unions and different …more difficult people than the corporation I said to my manager at the time 'I need to do a negotiation workshop' which she sent me off on. So it was really relevant to me because I had someone who identified skills … got some good training and therefore [I] produced it in the workplace.

Fay's course was offered in-house where the community of practice contextualised the learning. She had an immediate forum to practise her skills and a well-formed network to consolidate the learning.

Chris learned ways of thinking and structuring work through formal learning courses. His work community encouraged employees to articulate goals and processes when approaching new tasks. He expressed gratitude for his experience in learning with his company and counted himself as fortunate to attend a time-management course which provided him with a structured approach to planning his use of time in his personal and work life. He saw himself as working in a strong learning culture:

> … because of the progressiveness of our employer like, until a certain number of years ago, you were taught things, you knew people in other work environments weren't given that type of training.

Some workplaces, it would appear, left it to chance as to whether learners managed to integrate the learning with their workplace practice. Some, particularly those that operated under the apprenticeship model, used mentors 'ensuring that when you did things you'd be doing it to a certain standard'.

## Contribution of work to developing generic skills

In all skill areas, except 'being creative and innovative', work was seen as the primary source of generic skill development. Indeed 53.4% of participants cited it so, with 86.5% of these nominating work as one source of their skills. Because work played such a significant role in the development of generic skills, this section will deal with this learning domain in more detail.

Most participants (74.3%) believed that their generic skills were important to their work performance. When asked to assess the importance of each generic skill area to their current or former work, 56.6% of participants reported 'cultural understanding' as very important and 91.2% confirmed the importance of 'communication skills'. Only 10.1% of participants believed their generic skills were relatively unimportant, with 23.2% nominating 'using technology' as of little or no importance in their work and 17.3% believing the same of 'using mathematical ideas and techniques'. Almost 78% of participants believed that their generic skills were good enough for the work they were seeking, but 23.4% admitted that their skills in using technology were inadequate for the current job market.

One-fifth of the participants stated that they were not given the opportunity to develop their generic skills at work. Of the 56.8% who said that they were given ample opportunities to develop their skills, some commented that this was only through learning on the job, while others nominated numerous in-house training opportunities and other pathways.

### Evolving new work identities

Learning at work is the product of one's capacity to integrate new experience into work and hence develop new work identities (Timma 2001; Waterhouse 1999). Gonczi (2002b) reminds us that this is a social process as well as an individual one. Within the work environment, the new self is not one that individuals design in isolation. As noted earlier, worker identities are constructed through the social and discursive processes of communities of practice (Lave 1990; Falk 2002; Street 1984, 1992).

While these learning processes are social and situated, there are also personal, psychological and affective domains to the learning. As discussed earlier, there are issues of ownership and engagement that appear to be critical. This flight attendant, for example, demonstrates both her ownership and the social nature of her work identity.

> We don't have time to stand there and analyse if you've got a 45 minute sector from Sydney to Melbourne with 211 customers … sorry no time for the 'Oh maybe I'll do it this way'. You've got to think logically, so you've got to learn to listen as a flight attendant. You've got to learn, too, as a cabin manager to offer suggestions, pick up the best way for the whole team and run with it.

She has been specifically trained for her job and she has acquired a number of generic skills through feedback, modelling, consultation and reflection, within the context of her work community.

Jim notes the identity shift required of workers in a large telco company:

> These days they … expect you to … participate in, but at the same time have very good communication skills in terms of whether you're running reports or not, and working in teams … let's face it [our company] didn't value all those skills ten years ago, it's only with the advent of things that have occurred since.

Mal has also changed his behaviour in the light of changing management expectations:

> I mean we were expected to go to team briefs and ten years ago, you'd go to a team brief and fall asleep for 15 minutes and you go now and you try to participate and hope that by participating that your voice may be heard.

Jane tells of how she assisted the learning of a work colleague. The culture within the workplace had shifted and John was required to be someone else other than the somewhat bullying leader he had been in the past. Jane explained that: '… he'd just go and say. "Just go and ******* do it" and stuff like this', and the workers would respond in kind, swearing back at him. Jane is working with John to assist him in taking ownership of a new identity and in finding ways to fit himself to the new expectations. She described this process:

> [He] was very blokey and worked in the freight [area] which would be like a pretty blokey environment. He was rapt to be doing the course cos he had a real issue with one of the guys working for him and I remember John ringing me … 'What shall I do about this?' and he was asking lots of questions, and he got back … and said … 'Oh I just need to run this past you. Does this sound right? How I'm going to approach it is …' and his feedback afterwards was … he didn't know what to do because they … were actually talking to him like a normal person and he said it really put him on his back foot.

This example illustrates identity being reconstructed in the workplace. The learning is difficult for John and he is struggling to find the right words. In Gonczi's terms, 'Learning to do is also learning to become and belong' (Gonczi 2002b, p.12). John's need to become a different type of leader is motivated by legislative and cultural shifts in the work community rather than personal motivation. He is starting to embrace the shift personally at some level, and shows signs that he will be able to make the transition. The process is uncomfortable and he has to discard the self he has known in order to make the shift. However, that is part of the learning experience. It is a somewhat risky business. John's story shows how the workplace contribution to the development of generic skills is linked to personal processes of identification and identity formation.

## Taking the initiative

A number of informants spoke of opportunities to take the initiative at work as an important context for developing generic skills and new work identities. One participant took the risk of leaving 'the flock' and venturing into the new role of workplace negotiator. From a tentative beginning Douglas became the person who owned the title of 'negotiator':

> I mean you actually learned, it was something I had to learn. It was either just go with the flock, you know keep the head down and not say anything and just work … and they'd be happy as long as you looked busy, or actually start doing things. And I find that I had never done any … dispute resolution … before and I was getting into it. Then I began to be the person who got most of that to do, 'Oh you've done it before' and so it was recognised.

Phillip had a similar experience. He always saw himself as a quiet person. However, when he was working with a large power utility he believed that his union organiser was actively working with the employers, against the interests of the workers. Out of frustration he led a group of workers into another union and became a prominent spokesman and union representative within that union:

> I was very quiet. I was a classic example of someone who didn't want to be disturbed and was quite prepared to do his job. But when you realised that's just not enough, then you've got to do something about it. So yeah, it was a massive eye-opener for me. I certainly have a different view of the world now after [that workplace]. That's for sure.

The motivation to learn and take up a new workplace identity was different for Douglas and Phillip than for John who learned to moderate his aggressive behaviour at work. Sometimes requirements for new skills and a new identity are forced upon an employee and sometimes they are embraced, as was the situation with Kim. Kim was faced with redeployment and she reluctantly agreed to take a new job in the mail room of a large hospital. Her human resources manager remarked on the transformation she witnessed as Kim realised her capacity to manage change and take on other workplace roles:



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> I ran into [Kim] down here a couple of weeks ago actually and asked how her new job was going … And she said 'Oh … it's good, it's not something I'd do forever though'. Now I was astounded with that comment simply because to get her to move from the laundry to … [the mail room] was like shifting the Titanic, yet once she'd made the move, she's in something she's quite happy with, she has no intentions of staying there forever. In fact she's looking to see what else she might do.

Another participant, a hostess in a reception lounge showed a capacity to grasp an opportunity to both extend her skills and improve the customer service standards (which were not always consistent) in the lounge. Janet volunteered to write operating procedures for the hostesses. She adopted the quality system that operated in the rest of the organisation and utilised the power of that mechanism to change the behaviour of hostesses.

Such examples of initiative-taking suggest that the development and demonstration of generic skills involves more than simple processes of skills acquisition. Taking the initiative may involve some aspects of transformative learning and some risks to self. It may pose challenges to how workers see themselves (and are seen by others) in the work context.

## Learning from changing work circumstances

A number of participants gave examples of how the challenge of adapting to change, within workplaces and especially in new workplaces, has been the context or stimulus for them to develop new sets of skills. In this sense, 'adapting to change' can be seen as both a context for developing new skills and as a generic skill in itself. Janine, for example, said that:

> For the last 5 to 6 years our company's gone through … restructure on restructure, and particularly in the positions that I had in the last 5 years, when I had to apply for my job each year to keep it. Our workplace practices, our responsibilities and the technology just escalated in the last 5 years … That to me is experience that I'm very lucky to have had … I've had to learn more in the last 5 years than I've learned in the last 25 years with our company, to keep my position.

Ben had a similar story:

> … the actual changing of jobs, going from one industry to another industry and using skills from one industry to another. I think I adapted new skills, which helped me in the end.

However, not all change was seen in the same positive light. Reflecting on his experience of living through a major restructure and privatisation of a large public corporation, one participant commented: 'What I saw at (Company X) was to some extent frightening, but that's the way it goes'. Without this experience, including the discomfort and anxiety it created, he maintained he would not have developed the generic skills he needed for his current position: 'the skills I developed there were absolutely necessary'.

Other participants provided evidence of workplaces where pressure from downsizing and restructuring had negative effects on learning and skill development. Many of the participants who had been retrenched from banks and other corporate enterprises had a somewhat cynical view of generic skills as skills for employment in the light of their experiences. Briefly, their experiences were of hierarchical and undemocratic management practices, intense pressure to perform to survive rounds of retrenchments and demands for increased productivity. Those participants also described management practices that were counter-productive and in fact inimicable to the growth and enhancement of generic skills they valued in the workplace.

> … I think they [generic skills] are essential and they are valued but they get overwritten by the management, not necessarily staff, but by the management because of self-interest and more at the executive level, at the higher levels.

The pressure of many workplaces was such that fear seemed to be the over-riding factor:

> And so it's a context also when you're working with people whose orderly lives have already been thrown into disarray and often it's a context where jobs have been lost, where jobs are going to be lost … you're working with people and often there are people under intense stress and working under great fear because don't forget again, fear is one of the great apparent industrial motivators of our time.

Clearly, in such an environment, the ability to utilise skills, such as communication, innovation and creativity would be affected, as survival becomes the over-riding imperative.

### *Insulation or isolation?*

While exposure to such change processes can be corrosive, lack of exposure to the winds of change can also cause decay. A particularly interesting story of how insulation from workplace change resulted in holding back the skills growth of employees came from a human resources manager of a large hospital. The laundry at the hospital was to be closed and the services centralised. The employees were to be deployed elsewhere in the hospital. However, they were mostly migrants who had been employed in the laundry since their arrival in Australia some 15 or 20 years ago. Their manager, concerned about their limited English language and literacy skills, had taken on a protective role and insulated them from change over the years. While other hospital processes changed to incorporate new workplace systems, participative communication and safety structures, new technology and devolved authority, the laundry still maintained the practices it had evolved in the 1970s and 1980s. 'They've lived and worked in a very, very protected environment where their managers have known all of their little idiosyncrasies, and have built the workplace around those.'

Hence, when the human resources manager was faced with the prospect of redeploying these workers, she found they possessed few of the concepts, language or behaviours of the modern workplace. They had insufficient resources to deal with change and, on receiving their displacement notice, they were shattered. She worked consistently with each employee to negotiate a new 'work self' which they could own, and bit by bit, assisted them to grasp the new work demands. She concluded that in this case the over-protectiveness of the workplace had been in fact a barrier to the development of these people: 'whilst that might've created a haven for them, for all these years, it certainly didn't do them any great favours'.

Thus, what was intended as protective insulation became less than helpful isolation for the workers in the development of their employability skills.

## Changing requirements for skills at work

Recent reports of the skill requirements of Australian employers, such as *Industry speaks!* (Field 2001) and *Employability skills for Australian industry* (Curtis & McKenzie 2001) frame 'generic skills' as 'employability skills' or 'generic employability skills'. However, it is useful to maintain a distinction between 'generic skills' as skills that may be applicable across all areas of human activity, and 'generic *employability* skills' which are the generic skills desired by Australian employers for the purposes of contributing to enterprise productivity and hence to a more competitive economy. That is, they are skills required for a particular purpose, by a particular group, at a particular point in time and in a particular period of rapid economic, technical and organisational change. Furthermore, the list of required skills will vary across employers and enterprises (Curtis & McKenzie 2001, pp.48–52).

Most participants had long employment histories and could account for the development of their generic skills over the years or decades of their work. Their recollections can assist us to recognise the generic skills they brought to the work environment and those that are called for at

work and in the employment market. This section examines perceived changes to employability skills requirements as seen through the eyes of these displaced workers. It also highlights systemic barriers faced by these people in the current employment market. Many participants talked about these concerns. This section represents their collective voices to government and VET policy-makers on these issues. While not all of these issues can be addressed directly through vocational education and training, it is important that VET is part of the solution and not part of the problem.

## Experience re-defined the devaluing of expertise and cultural memory

Participants spoke about the company knowledge they had built up over time which they saw as an asset. They valued their knowledge of the technological history and the organisational evolution of the company. An employee of a large telco related his knowledge with pride:

> It was such a big company and you could see the infrastructure that already had been there and you could see the history of the company. You can see … the different stages in the exchanges … they still had mechanical switches which were [installed] in the 30s and 40s and they had stuff [from] the 60s and then stuff [from] the 80s and 90s. So you could see generations of equipment and that … made you think well … this company has been around and you're part of the history.

Loyalty in terms of years of service and willingness to ride the waves of the bad times as well as the good were read as reliability, trustworthiness and integrity: 'Resilience and durability were part of loyalty. They're not there now'. Loyalty provided the aspiration to achieve:

> I think you … realised that you're in a real good company and … you felt proud about being part of that company so you … thought 'Oh I could have a future now, I could have a job for life' … so you worked well, you become interested in it because of … trying to get a bit of pride out of it.

In the eyes of some participants, such attitudes and knowledge are no longer valued in the same terms by employers. A new set of values seems to be emerging based on a different understanding of expertise and the predominance of certain skills over others. Changing attitudes, knowledge and values have repositioned some of our participants on the employment hierarchy. Some people who saw themselves as sought-after experts have been re-identified within the employment market as having a limited and narrow experience base. Their experience no longer counts.

> … but then at the top end, we're finding within the … bank they were recruiting an awful lot of people from other industries and bringing them in to the bank … so-called change agents, they changed the culture of the place. The down side that I see to that is we're throwing the baby out with the bath water because you've lost all the culture, you've lost the experience and we go and make the same mistakes that were made 10, 15, 20 years ago because the experience that we learned we throw out the door and it's not memorised.

According to some participants, expertise comes with age and years of dedication to particular knowledge areas:

> I came with a massive history behind me and I am very good at what I do. I know a lot of areas because of the age I am.

However, in the experience of our participants, company and industry-based knowledge and experience is not marketable either internally or externally. There is a sense in which experience has been re-defined, from valuing depth to valuing diversity and currency. The demand for flexibility in the job market means: 'You start off as a baker and end as a candle-stick maker'. Yet, as one participant expressed it: 'You can't become an expert in 2 years'. In the new workplace culture expertise does not necessarily imply depth of knowledge.

Some participants maintained that their depth of knowledge and skill as experienced workers was being ignored in favour of recent qualifications.

> I got a job in the industry and started out working on the registers … I learned from the ground up about managerial skills about how to deal with the entire nursery, the ordering, the whole process and when I was in management for about a year, they employed a guy who came from … just a retail background, into the nursery industry as an assistant manager. He'd done management before but he was hopeless. He had no horticultural experience at all, nothing, but they wanted people in the industry who had managerial experience not just horticultural experience and it just didn't work at all. He didn't know anything about the products he was dealing with. He couldn't give people advice on anything but he had that managerial experience and that's all he had.

A rigger and scaffolder complained about the inability of 'young IR [industrial relations]' managers to recognise the value of experience on site by hiring anyone who had a 'ticket', regardless of their industrial experience.

> There was one supervisor up there and in the end he had to go to the office to find out who were the experienced blokes who had the old certification and the experience. He had to match one [experienced] bloke to every three or four with the new national tickets. So that there was one bloke there that knew what he was doing.

Out-sourcing of work has changed, some would say diminished, the knowledge and skills base within some organisations. The technological science unit of a large telco has been closed down. The research and development work of this group is now bought from overseas. The local scientists built their knowledge base over 25 years. Technical experts who were once world leaders now have no application for their expertise. They find that the demands of industry are for peripheral knowledge and reduced standards in quality and knowledge:

> You don't have to get it right … As long as it is almost right … We would spend a lot of time making sure the measurements we made were right. We now get told as long as 80% or so is right.

Many of these specialists were redeployed as engineers. While they had sufficient knowledge to get by, they expressed some concern for the hasty transfer of skills: 'It's dumbing down, dumbing down'. Many of these participants found themselves with a kit bag of skills which cannot be fully utilised:

> … we find a faulty board. Once upon a time there were people in the organisation that could find the fault and repair it on the board but now the board is just [replaced] … and the same with any other equipment that we find that doesn't work properly or if we find stuff that doesn't work within specifications the vendor just sends a tech specialist in.

Contrary to the rhetoric of the high-skill, high-knowledge workplace, some participants reported that centralising and out-sourcing policies meant that work skills have narrowed:

> I think work's been taken away so if anything you're doing less than you might've before. In a branch, say 5 years ago, you would've had a computer and report reader, somebody who looked at what had been done before, changes to people's accounts, new accounts and things like that and checked them to make sure that they were right. Well, that role in the bank has gone now and it's done more centrally.

Some participants reported the need to rename their experience. They disguised dates on their job applications, stressed the transferability of their skills so they appeared applicable to any industry, and wrote short and punchy applications rather than exposing their depth and expertise.

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## Personal career responsibility

For many, the new work environment has replaced jobs characterised by secure career development with jobs characterised by personal entrepreneurship. The individual is increasingly held responsible for his/her own evolution in the workforce. A placement officer described the realities of the employment market:

> … when you ask people what they want, it's invariably they want security of tenure and it just isn't there. And the very best employer in the whole world who wants to give it to you can't because they can't see that far down the track. They haven't got it themselves let alone how they could give it to an employee. It's just not there. So I think that is one of the major things an employer is looking for is that self-ownership. 'I need to manage this change and I need to own my own career and not depend upon others'. This is a major shift in thinking, that ability to change.

As a consequence there is a requirement for what some might see as new generic skills, the skills to self-manage one's career. A placement officer reported:

> … if people don't … own their career and don't see the need to develop skills … then it's not going to work. And that to me seems to be the biggest barrier, that people still aren't realising that they have to manage their own career. That nobody else gives a rats.

For many of our participants, security was part of the package in their employment. However, it originally carried with it the expectation of employee loyalty, pride and career commitment as part of the process of contributing skills to the building of the company:

> … for work satisfaction you want to be loyal to a company, you want to have a goal and you want to see a future and it's one thing to want to keep on reinventing yourself every few years but if you are very specific in the industry that you enjoy being in, then I think it's nice if you do have a career path … back in the old days when people were loyal to their company, they built a company and they were proud of it.

Employees who had been employed for a long time with one company found work satisfaction in their sense of belonging. However, it appears the contract has been rewritten within some organisations. Employers expect to buy skilled workers fully formed, as pointed out by the placement agency cited earlier:

> They want everybody to be all singing all dancing, the employers. It's certainly an employer's market. They will take a clerical person in but they have to have [a particular business application] they have to have a certain amount of accounting. They have to have just about every software package they're likely to need and yet they're basically clerical and they're paying them somewhere in the vicinity of $13 per hour.

Another participant, now an employer, confirmed the challenges facing employers and the effects this has on prospective employees:

> Well now that I'm an employer, I certainly look at things differently. I don't like to lie to people … I tell them straight up, 'Nothing is sacred, I can't guarantee anything, you may have a job for a week, you may have a job for two months' … I've seen employers offer all sorts of wonderful things … I think the employers are the ones that need to be honest and stop offering things that they *think* they can do.

A few participants embraced this view of the employment market as being liberating:

> Actually, I think it's wonderful the opportunities are there for you to do it, and I actually feel quite buoyed by the idea that I can get new skills and then go and get a new job in another field and in this day and age it's quite ok … I think it's wonderful to have that opportunity these days to … reinvent myself.

Others viewed the uncertainty and insecurity as a means to ensure compliance and to create a culture of fear:

> It also seems to be that the constant threat of the sword of Damocles hovering around everyone's head is used as a tool by people who established 'corporate cultures' … to act as a constant reminder that you're highly expendable and we will have no hesitation in flicking you off.

In order to be successful in the current market environment it seems employees and job seekers are receiving the message they need to accept, even embrace, competitive work relationships and concepts of personal entrepreneurship. According to one work placement officer, competition is the new value and the new skill that both the employed and unemployed need to develop:

> The basic thing they need to know is any career is only likely to last 7 years maximum … every kid should know that 'As soon as I start to feel comfortable I should be looking around thinking this may not last. What do I have to do? If this stopped tomorrow, what do I have to do to be competitive out there?'—because it just as likely will … That's what they don't know.

Many of the participants expressed frustration and dismay about the expectation that self-managing their careers also seemed to require this increasingly competitive orientation to life and work. Others noted the challenges in 'reading the market'. They stressed that possession of skills, even sophisticated technical skills, offers no guarantees of success in the employment market. One group of participants believed they were unemployed largely as a direct result of their training in their area of specialisation:

> We've all got very good technical skills and possibly skills that are comparable or better than some of the people that remained in jobs but unfortunately we were sort of aligned with the wrong technology. A technology that wasn't the in thing, I mean they're focussing at the moment on other technologies.

One participant, a qualified librarian, reported how, with considerable personal sacrifice and expense, she completed post-graduate qualifications to equip her for specialist roles in her profession. Despite her high level of qualifications and repeated applications, she was still unable to secure meaningful employment. Another participant cited a colourful example to illustrate the importance of having marketable skills. You could be 'the best horsewhip maker in the land' he suggested, but 'we've only got 100 horses'. 'I think', he said 'we can close the doors right down on horsewhip making'.

Skills development involves something of a gamble in the employment market where the stakes are high and the risk is borne increasingly by the individual. The individual has no control over the variables of market fluctuations and corporate decision-making, perhaps little information about trends and local variables, but is required nevertheless to predict the market needs for particular skills.

## Sales skills and synthetic relationships

Retrenched bank employees in two different focus groups told similar stories, revealing that the shift in culture discounted the generic skills and expertise they had developed over years.

> It seems to me now that their sales targets are the things that override everything. You can work really well in teams and have really good mathematical skills and problem-solving and stuff but if you don't sell your four housing loans a month, you get a performance [review].

Some informants talked about a new persona they were expected to take on in the workplace that sometimes threatened their personal integrity.

> You have to represent yourself as … in some ways it can be a charade, you have to be someone you're not … to sell to little old ladies … you have to market yourself in a way and very often you're marketing something that the bank wants, but it's not necessarily who

> you are. And that's why I'm glad to be out, because I can be who I am now. Not what I had to be to fit the mould.

This reluctance to 'play the game', particularly when the 'game' was at variance with their personal ethics, was evident among participants, 87.2% of whom said it was important to them that their work made a contribution to the good of society. Almost 59% also said they were not prepared to compromise their values to get a job. It appears that the new persona in some organisations requires the display of a sense of loyalty that some see as synthetic, contingent and superficial, lasting only as long as the employment contract.

> They want loyal staff and staff are trying to be as loyal as they possibly can … I know a few of the staff that have been made redundant in the last couple of months but [they] had various opportunities to get out of where they were to earn more money, but … they were loyal to the company that they were working for. And at the end [the company] just goes 'Well who cares whether you've been loyal? You're still out anyhow' … What I've seen is you can give eleven years of loyal service and then … [the informant makes a dismissive gesture as if flicking muck off the back of his hand] You get the flick. That's the loyalty I've seen.

Another participant noted:

> As soon as you joined [the company] … you had to buy the uniform, you had to go to staff training, you had to go in your own time, you had to get yourself there, you weren't paid for it. If you didn't dedicate yourself to that company and make yourself available … you weren't a team player. It was very important to be seen as giving all.

Ironically, despite the emphasis on being a 'team player', some participants reported that genuine teamwork and co-operation was not always valued: 'I think there is a swing away from working in teams … In the past we worked in teams. Now teamwork is pretty well gone'.

Some participants reported how fragmented and competitive work structures had undermined teamwork. The overriding message coming through such comments was that new workplace cultures are calling for a re-making of self, a new orientation to life and work. Regardless of whether the skills are new, priorities have been reshuffled making many of the skills of older workers invisible or apparently redundant.

## Transferability of generic skills

As discussed earlier, much of the policy literature on generic skills suggests their inherent transferability. However, the research exploring actual generic skills in action, in workplaces, (eds Sefton, Waterhouse & Deakin 1994; ed. Stevenson 1996) and the literature addressing the pedagogical aspects of transferability (Misko 1995; Down 2001) suggests the need to reconsider assumptions of transferability. It is useful to think about *applying* or *re-applying* skills in new and different contexts rather than transferring them. This section addresses findings on these issues.

Most participants (68.5%) believed that the generic skills they had developed would readily transfer to new areas of work. Over three-quarters of respondents (76.5%) believed that their generic skills were good enough to meet the demands and expectations of the work they were seeking. Most (87.2%) had found it necessary to continually learn new work skills in order to find work.

*Prima facie*, transferability is assumed to be there. When asked to grade the level of his various generic skills, one participant, a tertiary-qualified and experienced landscape gardener and qualified workplace trainer, consistently rated himself fairly highly. However, he made the point that he was talking 'in relation to the sort of work I normally do'. He did not see these skills as being necessarily transferable to another situation and would have graded them differently in

relation to another type of work. He wasn't sure if they would transfer, as he had never worked outside his field.

> I think my range of skills are pretty much in a couple of areas and I would say that it's only in those areas that are likely to use that set of skills … my view is that employers want particular communication skills. It may not be just enough to manage day to day in a work situation. It may be in a particular area where communication is the main part of the job and you may need, I don't know, a much higher level of social skills or something.

He believed that it is up to the employer to give training in the specific skills required in his workplace:

> I think it's the particular skills that are needed for a particular workplace and … particular just to that workplace. I think it is up to the employer to provide the necessary training and I'm quite happy to take on whatever needs to be done.

Patrick said that while skills with specific software packages soon became redundant, the skill of mastering new software is transferable:

> Wordperfect 3.1, I have an installation certificate, Windows 3.1, Wordperfect 5.1, lots of these programs … I was the manager, business manager, [and] I was expert in all these programs. They don't exist any more. And so all those bits of paper and all those qualifications are crap—they're rubbish. But what it does do is that I could say 'I can learn a different program'.

Patrick made a similar observation about the generic skills involved in running a retail organisation.

> If you can run a framing franchise, and you can do stock control, and you can meet productivity targets, and you can manage pay and all that kind of stuff for staff, then actually if you need to do an implementation for Just Jeans from an IT point of view, you actually understand what the objectives of the retail organisations are. Because you've actually run a retail organisation. They don't see that on your CV.

For Patrick, the problem is not the transferability of skills but the reluctance of employers to consider them:

> No, the skills are definitely transferable, but it's the ability to get to the interview is hampered by … I would say that the employment agencies in my particular field present to me an obstacle and not an opportunity. Because [the human resource managers] can't … they're 24 years old and when they were 12, Windows95 came out, they have no experience of life before Windows95.

While he had analysed his skills in understanding systems and was able to imagine himself re-applying these skills in different contexts, it was his perception that the younger human resources people he was dealing with did not make the same connections.

Jan had a similar but different problem with being 'typecast' in particular roles.

> No, no, I don't believe I'm tied to the aviation industry. What I'm having difficulty with is that other people have tied me to that, they just go 'Oh aviation—no'. Whereas I look and go well the skills that I've got are very broad … Transport, hospitality, retail, even manufacturing, all those things—my skills are transferable to any of that.

Despite their interest in generic skills, respondents have encountered resistance from employers who focus instead on narrowly defined sets of technical skills:

> I find that industries are very precious about their product and I think that employers find it very difficult to look at someone for example that has been just in aviation or just in retail and for them to say alright they have the skills … they're saying 'I want someone who's got the product experience'. Now product you can learn but they tend to be quite precious about it, 'But mine is special and I need someone who understands that'.



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It would appear that employers also see generic skills as highly context-based.

Another participant talked of packaging his skills for his resume:

> The first go at writing a resume—brilliant to me. Someone in another industry would read it [and say] 'It's double Dutch'. They don't understand what I'm talking about … I need to learn to project myself accurately.

This need to reconsider skills was reiterated by others. One participant looked on his computer skills somewhat negatively compared to his work mates:

> I'm comparing myself against some very skilled people and I'd say I'm not very skilled. But when I compare myself with the general population—they see me as a guru at times.

These examples challenge assumptions about the transferability of generic skills. Once unhinged from context, generic skills quickly become so loosely defined that the concept becomes meaningless. For many, application of their generic skills in a new or different context appears relatively unproblematic and unconscious. However, there is also evidence to suggest that re-applying generic skills in a different setting is not necessarily automatic. What parts of problem solving, communication, leadership … are transferable to what organisational culture? There may be a need for active processes of repackaging the skills and envisaging oneself in different ways and different contexts (Marginson 1995; Down 2001; Sandberg 2000). However, this process can be actively supported and facilitated. Some participants indicated that they needed this kind of support in being able to identify, perhaps re-badge, and 'transfer' their skills.

Despite believing that their generic skills were applicable in different contexts, most participants remained somewhat pessimistic about being given the opportunity to demonstrate this within the current employment market. Nearly half (48.6%) believed that they would not be able to get another job at the same level of work as in the past.

## Issues relating to employment and employability

As noted previously, many participants spoke about the barriers to employment they were faced with. Given the responsibility being placed upon individuals to maintain their own employment, it is worth noting that these barriers involve some factors that are well beyond the control of individuals.

### Lack of qualifications

The lack of formal qualifications and difficulties gaining recognition for skills and experience were problems cited repeatedly by respondents, as an ex-banking employee noted:

> Qualifications, a lot of places are looking for degrees. I've never studied, I've always got all of my promotions and jobs from the fact that I can actually do it. I don't have any pieces of paper to say I can.

Many of the displaced workers were disadvantaged, despite their overall level of skill, by the fact that they had spent their working lives with one or two employers and had progressed through the ranks without gaining formal qualifications. This was particularly true for workers who had been made unemployed after years in banking, telecommunications, manufacturing or retail industries. One woman who was the manager of finances in a large factory employing over 700 people had no formal accounting qualifications, and is now seeking work as an administrative assistant.

A placement officer related the story of Rosemary, an ex-manager, seeking work. She had made it to the interview stage but, she reported:

> They started using language that I had no idea what they were talking about and I knew I had lost it and I didn't have a clue how to fix it.

She was thrown by reference to Gantt charts. However, upon further investigation, it appeared that although Rosemary was not familiar with the term, she was very fluent with the instrument. In the estimation of the placement officer, Rosemary needed only one subject within a management course in order to become familiar with the generic industry terms for her management practices. However, she encountered another barrier at this point. Access to a single subject was almost impossible to secure in isolation from a long course. As the placement officer said, people like Rosemary are:

> good at their job but they haven't done the qualification to have the language skills to progress outside of their known area and they don't know what they don't know.

In this case there was an urgency to achieve the skills and it was beyond the capacity of the local TAFE institute to meet the need:

> Most of them do not have a lot of time and the part that frustrates me is the major providers of skill, vocational skills in particular are not in the real world about what time people can devote. You know, one day a week at TAFE for 6 months just doesn't work. People haven't got 6 months.

There were many participants with impressive experience who had problems gaining official recognition for their skills. Another participant noted:

> I did all my systems training back in 1992 and I have worked consistently up till now for 10 years so I know the stuff backwards … I don't have a qualification …because I did my training before they even invented it but that is a tick in the box to get you an interview today … Where a huge deficiency exists at the moment is there is no way to get any assistance to convert experience into qualification … for me to sit the … exams it's $1000 … Now I can't afford that but the normal course would take you 12 months maybe 2 years to get there whereas with 2 to 3 months I could probably qualify. The problem is I can neither afford the training materials, the 2 or 3 months off or the exams but, within a couple of months I could get up to speed with anyone coming out of university with 20 years experience behind me.

It should be noted, however, that even with impressive qualifications and substantial experience, some job seekers, particularly those who were older, reported finding the competition in the job market overwhelming. When one participant sought an explanation as to why she missed out on an interview for a job for which she was highly qualified, she was given this response:

> We had 160 applicants for that role and there are 22 people who have actually done this specific job. So it's no reflection on you it's just that the client wanted A,B,C and we were able to give them people who had A,B,C,D so that's what you are up against.

## Cost of recognition of prior learning

The cost of recognition of prior learning created a substantial barrier in a number of instances. One participant, formerly in the British Navy, spent his years as a painter applying industrial coatings to submarines.

> I approached the bloke at TAFE [locally] …and he rung up this [place in Melbourne] … and they sent the paperwork to get my skills recognised. Unfortunately that's going to cost me probably about $1500 all up for me to go and get these skills recognised. First off, I need $500 to go and do the training to show them what I've got and what I haven't got and then a further $1000 to complete the necessary skills to get this paper-work, and being unemployed I just haven't got this money to do that. So it's a sort of catch 22.

Such stories suggest significant challenges for the VET system in supporting displaced workers and in developing user-friendly and cost-effective processes to facilitate recognition of prior learning and current competence.

## Being over-qualified

In the eyes of some participants, qualifications can be a barrier in themselves if the applicant is considered over-qualified:

> I had an interview at … a leading Melbourne hotel. The interview went fine, until she said 'well I don't really even know where to slot you in'. Straight away … I knew I wouldn't get the job. But they don't actually tell you that you're over-qualified, they send you a letter saying 'excellent skills, we're impressed with your skills but sorry there's no position'. That's just a polite way of telling you that you're over-qualified, even though you've applied for a position lower than what your qualifications are, that you're prepared to start from the bottom and work your way up, a lot of places won't give you that chance.

Informants reported that over-qualified people were seen to be a threat to a less-qualified manager and unlikely to remain in the job.

## Surviving injury or ill health

Those participants who had suffered from ill health, injury or accident had additional barriers to overcome. Ben had an industrial accident in 1999, resulting in the loss of a leg and eight months' hospitalisation. During that period he learned patience in dealing with pain and 'patience to focus on keeping my mind active'. He developed skills of reading, research and internet research. The whole experience gave him a 'passion' for teaching people safe work practices and accident prevention. He was retraining for a new work career in occupational health and safety while still coping with severe pain and the possibility of further surgery.

A former machinist in a clothing factory had suffered severe repetitive strain injury to her shoulder, which had required surgery. She had been pronounced fit for work again. However, her doctor limited her to non-repetitive work. She had undertaken retraining, completing a Certificate 4 in Retail, Safe Food Handling and an introductory course in computers. At 57 years of age she was having difficulties finding work. As she said: 'I can do anything, providing they give me enough time. The trouble is that work is not like that'.

She believed that being on Workcover, and being obliged to give that information to prospective employers, hindered her ability to get work. She felt that:

> I've already cut myself out of any chance to getting employment in that place because I've got an injury and, because it makes me nervous, I let myself down when I'm walking in the door anyway. I try and be confident, but it's very hard.

A former taxi driver had had to give up his job because of the stress of over-work, resulting in ill health: 'They would ring you up at all hours to work. If you turned them down they wouldn't ring again. So I ended up working day and night'.

For these workers, the added strain of coping with pain or ill health and seeking a job compounded the problems.

## Ageism

The most significant barrier identified by many participants was one of age discrimination, confirming findings from other studies (ed. Smith 1999; Wooden et al. 2001). The experiences and passion surrounding this issue cannot be effectively conveyed here. However, it would be an injustice to the participants in this study not to record, as a significant issue, the experiences of age discrimination and negative stereotypes about older workers.

> I went through the interview. As we say, you come second. Actually with one fellow I spoke to, and he said to me, doors were closed and everything was off, and I said 'It's my age isn't it' and he goes 'I wanted you. You've got more experience, bla bla bla the whole

business. It came from a higher authority that we want someone about 25–30, who's got a mortgage, a good look'.

Even people in their mid-30s encountered age discrimination:

> The older you get the more difficult it becomes too. I'm in a position now where I think 'I'm 36, and I've got more in common with somebody who's 52 than someone who's 21'. And actually I'm heading towards that end of the employment market.

Some job seekers disguised their age in the hope of bypassing the prejudice:

> I've only just taken [my age] off every interview I've been to, I've only had about nine interviews, and I've applied for about 60 jobs, I've been the oldest by far, about 10 years, and I'm only 36, and I feel really old.

The waste of resources and the cost to the self-esteem of experienced workers contradicts the rhetoric of lifelong learning and the pressure from the government to extend working lives.

## Length of unemployment

In a finding confirmed by other research (Ball 1999, p.72) some participants reported that the length of time they had been unemployed was creating a further barrier to their employability. One participant had been largely unemployed for the past two years:

> The barrier I am facing now is I've probably been unemployed for too long. The barrier is getting a foot in the door, someone wanting to give me a go.

## The psychological impacts of unemployment

A number of participants spoke about the need to deal with the disorientation and loss of identity they experienced on becoming unemployed, before being able to go on to seek new employment:

> With most of us I think a big barrier is the fact that we are at the cross roads, so it is such a different change for us in life, that I think that it is a barrier, because we may seem like we are lost and indecisive in interview, but that's not the case at all. Really, in interviews we are reassessing our whole life in that interview, and it may not come across in a positive way … you've almost had the carpet just pulled out under you, I mean you have a mortgage, you've got kids, you've got this and that, and you've got personal issues … then all of a sudden you've got no job, no nothing, so it's reassessing everything in life, pretty much so, it's not just you've lost a job, your job is your way of life.
>
> … it is shattered dreams, and even those who hated their jobs, the devastation that they had, because they just took it for granted, a lot hadn't been out of the workforce …
>
> My work was my life …

Some who had experienced isolation and constant rejection talked about feelings of loneliness and depression. The emotional aftermath of redundancy and unemployment can itself be a barrier to re-employment. That there can no longer be an expectation of linear career development and security of tenure is a fundamental change which has profound psychological as well as social impacts. Some displaced workers talked about a loss of identity. One participant described being a:

> mature-aged person who has a lot of experience, who's contributed to the workforce, who's paid taxes, who's never had to rely on Centrelink in their lives … and who is now lumped in with … the derelicts of society.

Some found their experiences with Centrelink destructive of their self-esteem. Some talked about the isolation of unemployment and others highlighted the importance of networks and support groups. Placement officers, working in Brisbane on a project to assist Ansett employees, helped

their clients to envisage a positive future and to reconceptualise their experience. One placement officer said:

> you're not out of work, you are developing a new career, you are researching your own development … a good consultant won't send anyone off to a course within the first two weeks of seeing that person for two hours, because that person does not know what they want. That person needs to be nurtured.

The positive stories suggest the power of appropriate support and interventions to turn negative experiences into positive learning and growth.

The changed nature of work and the labour market has created a need for coming generations to be educated with a conscious view to the development of qualities of self-confidence and resilience in order to survive the tough times ahead. Such qualities could be couched as 'generic skills'. Falk (2002) refers to 'identity resources'. However they are labelled, it is apparent that employers are calling for employees equipped with the kind of 'resilience' or mental toughness that would enable them to weather the rigours of the new workplace and the vicissitudes of the labour market (Kearns 2001; Curtis & McKenzie 2001). The call by employers for such 'skills' or 'attributes' suggests that a fundamental value change has taken place—an acceptance of impermanence, change and hardship as conditions for personal success and survival. The call for 'flexibility' and 'resilience' also has educational implications: that school and post-school education find ways of supporting and encouraging the development of such qualities. These are issues that VET and the education system in general will need to address. It is to these implications that we turn in the following and final section of this report.

# Issues and implications

## Introduction

This section outlines the main issues and addresses the implications that emerged from the study. It interprets the results in relation to the following research questions:

- How can VET practitioners foster the development of generic skills?
- How can enterprises foster generic skill development?
- How do generic skills transfer to new contexts?
- How can the VET system best assist the development of generic skills for the new workforce?
- What means of assessment can best represent generic skills for experienced workers?
- What is the relationship between generic skills and employability?

In addressing these questions, this part of the report attempts to engage between the discourse of grounded, contextualised generic skills of workplace and social practice and the discourse of decontextualised generic skills associated with policy and general reference.

The chapter begins by looking at the challenges to the current system and industry practice that emanate from the findings. The findings that relate to the learning and development of generic skills present a challenge to:

- current VET practice by repositioning experiential learning as central. This has implications for the identity of teachers and their role in skill development
- workplaces because they have been acknowledged as the most significant site for skill development. This has implications for the way workplaces develop skills and provide opportunities for learning
- popular understandings of transfer which oversimplify the transfer process. This has implications for both the role of VET professional and workplace organisation
- training packages because they provide a limited scope for generic skills development beyond the immediately functional and practical skills. As a corollary, there are implications for the assessment of generic skills and their recognition within the VET system
- the education and training system which should recognise the needs of the new workforce as it flows in and out of employment, continuously adjusting and developing new generic skills. This has implications for the way the VET system takes on the employability agenda, particularly the way the unemployed are supported and assisted to keep their skills current.

## Experiential learning: A challenge to current VET practice

The learning from this research suggests a re-appraisal of current approaches to training. It draws into focus the lifelong learning agenda, amplifying the contribution of experiential learning to skills development and calling for new responses from VET professionals.

The lifelong learning agenda recognises the role of experiential learning in accumulating the stock of skills that make up the national profile of the workforce. Processes of recognition of prior learning and recognition of current competencies give recognition to experiential learning as a legitimate means of skill accumulation, where this was seen as something outside the orbit of formal training. Community and workplace activity, as well as self-teaching, are acknowledged as primary sources of experiential learning.

If the VET sector were to genuinely embrace principles of experiential learning, it would need to seriously re-assess its own performance. The challenge goes beyond accepting 'experiential learning' as another learning 'method' or technique to be added to the vocational educator's repertoire. Such acceptance would be useful and it could lead to more integrated and holistic approaches to the development of generic skills and many other competencies. However, at a more profound level, accepting the potential of experiential learning entails teachers and trainers relinquishing their presumed control over learning (through training) and recognising that learning happens in a multitude of ways, ways that are as rich and diverse as the life journeys and experiences of individuals. The workplace educator's task then becomes twofold:

- creating opportunities for skill development through experiential learning in workplaces
- working actively with individuals to reflect on their experience, to capitalise on the learning potential and transferable qualities that can be drawn from this experience.

We will return to the matter of transferability in the next section. For here, suffice it to say that, at a one-to-one and small group level, educators can assist individuals to recognise, appreciate, and, where necessary, articulate and re-apply this learning for different purposes.

At a worksite level educators can work with enterprise and organisational personnel to structure the workplace in ways that foster learning. With an understanding of the dynamics of 'communities of practice' (Lave 1990; Lave & Wenger 1991; Billett 1994) VET professionals can evaluate the learning capacity of workplaces. As training consultants they can work alongside workplace personnel to enhance the learning potential of work environments and work relationships in such a way that they advantage both the workplace and the individual. Workplace models have already been identified in studies such as those of Taylor et al. (1996), Sefton, Waterhouse and Cooney (1995) and Stevenson (ed. 1996). Billett's recent publication *Learning in the workplace* (2001b) offers a well-researched guide in developing skill through work. He pays attention to designing work to encourage learning and mediating learning experience.

The message for VET professionals demands a re-identification of teachers as learning managers and that they develop a co-management relationship with training personnel. The goal is set at maximising opportunities for experiential learning and nurturing learning organisations and positive, vibrant communities of practice as amplified below.

## Challenge to popular understandings of 'transferability'

This research has problematised the assumptions about the transferability of generic skills. The 'commonsense', taken-for-granted understanding of generic skills is that they are *inherently* transferable (as suggested by the term 'generic' itself). However, the evidence from this and other studies suggests that effective transfer is not automatic. This is not to suggest that transfer does not take place, as clearly it takes place constantly, as we build on and refine our existing skills in the course of our working lives. The respondents in this study reported that they believed, on the whole, that their generic skills are transferable to other contexts. However, when they talked about the development and application of these skills, they talked of particular circumstances, unique problems and contexts, indicating that their skill and knowledge development was situated or embedded in various ways.

This study suggests that the 'transfer' of these competencies into new contexts is contingent upon at least two interrelated sets of concerns. The first relates to the nature of the new context:

does the new/different context provide opportunities, or what Billett (2001b) calls 'affordances', for the demonstration and continuing development of these competencies? The second set of concerns surrounds the nature of the reflective learning and analysis that may be undertaken in the transfer process. Metaphors of packing, unpacking and repacking, or deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge and skills (Down 2001) are helpful for reconceptualising these 'transfer' processes. Evidence suggests that those who are given opportunities and a discourse in which to consciously reflect upon and identify the generic skills they have developed may be in a position to transfer their skills more effectively and speedily.

The complex and contingent nature of the transfer process suggests the need for active and critical support to facilitate transferability. Both VET providers and employers have important roles to play in these processes. It might be noted that, as far as employers are concerned, the development of effective workplace/organisational cultures is fundamental to this process (see also Figgis et al. 2001). The appropriate culture is necessary not only for the 'in-house' development of these competencies but also to 'harness' the generic skills of contractors, sessional and peripheral workers. The nature of these skills is that, even when 'present', they may be 'invisible', innate or inactive, like desert seeds waiting for the right conditions to sprout.

As discussed earlier, VET training at all levels could include learning modules in which learners are introduced to the notion of generic skills and invited to reflect on the nature and development of their own generic skills. Having a language with which to reflect on, identify and articulate one's skills would enhance confidence and facilitate processes of generic skills transfer.

It must also be said that, in terms of our earlier discussion about the holistic, contextual and relational nature of 'generic skills', the terms 'transfer' and 'transferability' are themselves problematic in that they again connote generic skills as distinct entities that can be 'moved' from one context to another. In this sense, the term 'new application of generic skills' may be more appropriate, as it is more compatible with the notion of generic skills as holistic and relational. Skills that are applied in new circumstances inevitably evolve and develop according to new conditions and new challenges.

Kearns (2001), Down (1997, 2000), Falk (2002), Adult Literacy and Learning, Australian Research Consortium (2000) and others have exposed a level of discomfort and uncertainty among VET professionals in their understanding and teaching of generic skills. Most, it appears, do not address generic skills. Researchers indicate the need for the specific teaching of transferability, which suggests a gradient increase on an already steep learning curve for many educators, requiring not only that generic skills be addressed, but that transferability be unpacked. If VET has a role in generic skills development, urgent action is needed to re-identify the role of educators, to equip them to accomplish the role and to reassess the way in which generic skills may be accommodated in training packages.

The research team concluded that this was a matter of major importance. If fully qualified and experienced VET teachers struggle with the integration of generic skills into their practice, then it is likely that many less trained workplace trainer/assessors are even less equipped and may not have even been exposed to the issues. Generic skills are not addressed in the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training at all. This is an urgent point of action for the VET system.

## Challenge to current workplace organisation—learning organisations and global contexts

Overwhelmingly, the findings of this research indicate that:

- the most important source of generic skills in relation to work is the workplace
- generic skills develop throughout life and are not simply 'acquired' in a single 'dose' that can then be applied everywhere

- transfer of generic skills is not automatic—transfer of generic skills to new contexts depends on an environment that fosters such 'transfer'.

This study produced examples of workplace learning that occurred as a result of negative experiences, such as downsizing. As one participant stated: 'What I saw [in that job] was to some degree frightening but that's the way it goes … I don't think I would have been able to survive in [my current] business without those skills'.

However, many examples were also given where positive learning took place within workplaces, resulting in the development of generic skills. These workers were able to take advantage of opportunities to carry out a variety of tasks and roles, participate in the sharing of knowledge and expertise, to take the initiative, to collaborate in solving problems and to be mentored by more experienced workers (see also Figgis et al. 2001). Enterprises that provide such a context can be described as 'learning organisations' in which a 'culture of learning' and a commitment to training frame the way work is organised and the way in which management operates. Briefly put, the learning organisation provides the best way for enterprises to make the most of workers generic (or 'hidden') skills and talents and to facilitate the development of their human potential.

Unfortunately, it appears that there are enterprises where training is now a low priority (Buchanan, Evesson & Briggs 2002). Globalisation is intensifying competition for markets and enterprises are forced to cut production costs by downsizing, casualisation, outsourcing, and the use of contract and labour hire. Workplaces are under-staffed and work is intensified. In this context, training becomes a luxury for the future and in conflict with the means of providing returns for the present. Instead of maintaining and developing the skills base of the Australian workforce, employers are forced to trade sustainability for short-term gains in the manner of 'farmers eating their own seeds' (Buchanan, Evesson & Briggs 2002).

Buchanan, Evesson and Briggs's findings fit with the observations of many of the participants in this study: that downsizing, out-sourcing, the demands for improved performance outcomes and aggressive line management have in fact created workplaces and 'communities of practice' in which skills learning and training cannot be a priority. While employers are now calling for workers to be well equipped with generic skills, it appears that, in the pressure to survive intensifying competition, the conditions for the acknowledgement and development of generic skills are being eroded. This is ironic, in that a broad consensus is now emerging that a 'generically skilled' workforce is an essential ingredient for efficient and productive workplaces.

The challenge for workplaces, employers and human resource managers is to provide a positive learning environment that encourages the development and application of generic skills and harnesses the potential of employees. While employees may have many generic skills on employment, how well these skills develop and become applied to the workplace will depend largely on the workplace environment. This message may be unpalatable to workplaces in the context of the demand for leaner staffing levels and transient personnel.

## Challenge to current practices associated with assessment and training packages

Currently, training packages focus mainly on specific competencies and task skills and do not explicitly provide frameworks for generic skills development. While the skilled and creative teacher can structure learning experiences to facilitate the development of generic skills, there is insufficient instruction and guidance as to how this might take place in industry settings and how transferability can be accomplished. If training packages are to facilitate the development of generic skills, then those involved in the delivery must have the professional capacity to work on a broadly developmental level with trainees. This has significant professional development implications.

According to Down's recent research (2002) the current education and assessment paradigm is geared to formal learning which favours mechanisms of patterning and linear logic. Skills such as these are not useful to informal learners for whom the main mechanisms are trial and error, involving risk and experimentation. Teaching for transferability requires a commitment to these principles which, she notes, are far from the discourse of current practice and unlikely to be embraced in VET practice or policy. The assessment superstructure seems particularly unsympathetic to this understanding of transferability. Current assessment practice demands uncritical reproduction of skill as defined by the predetermined elements of competence. Hence we are not talking about a small adjustment to current practice but a re-identification of the role of practitioners and their adoption of new practices.

## Generic skills and 'assessment'

Most participants (58%) believed that some form of written assessment of their generic skills might help them to acquire employment. However, they understood and spoke about their generic skills within particular contexts. This observation draws into question whether conventional competency-based assessment methods would capture generic skill capabilities or the capacity for transfer. Participants were often unaware of the slippage between their understanding of generic skills in the contextualised sense and generic skills in the decontextualised sense.

The findings revealed that lists of generic skills were inadequate to describe the skills identified by participants, and indeed the employers' survey (Curtis & MacKenzie 2001) confirmed that each employer would want to select the 'employability' skills from within lists suiting their own circumstances. Employers have in mind skills needed to accomplish particular tasks in a manner consistent with their specific workplace culture.

The issue of 'assessment' implies the type of assessment processes that are explicit in the national training packages. To talk of assessing generic skills in the same manner implies that it is possible to first list these skills in a way that makes them assessable and second, to assess them in one context on the assumption that they are unproblematically transferable to another context. The findings of this study challenge both of these assumptions.

On the whole, the discourse of policy tends to conceptualise generic skills as inherently transferable. Furthermore, these skills are conceptualised within this discourse as if they are somehow carried as discrete entities within the person. The individual is assessed as competent (or incompetent), and it is the individual that carries the responsibility both for the attainment and the demonstration of these skills. In policy terms (while there may be continuing debates about lists and definitions), the fundamental conceptualisation of these skills is seen as relatively unproblematic. They are almost universally acknowledged as important, teachable and measurable. This approach leads to an 'autonomous' and atomistic approach to the development of generic skills in education and training, devoid of context, and begs the question of how people learn.

On the other hand, within the discourse of practice, these skills are seen as embedded, situated and context-bound. Our data underline the view that they are really only meaningful when seen in action, in a particular context for a genuine purpose. They can be *talked about* in the abstract, but they cannot be demonstrated in the abstract. They cannot be enacted in the abstract. Good teachers and trainers know that sound educational practice works from the particular and the concrete to the general and the abstract (not the other way around). They know that the teaching, learning and development of these skills depends upon the individual meanings learners construct for them and the ways they apply them in their particular environments. Furthermore, the research clearly indicates that these meanings and the particular applications of generic skills are not constructed in isolation, they are constructed in a social context, through 'communities of practice'. Thus there is an important sense in which these skills, in action, are collective constructions.

This view of learning reinforces the need for experiential learning that is a more holistic, systems-based approach to education and training for generic skills, within particular contexts. It also indicates the need to assist individuals by providing a non-prescriptive understanding of generic skills, a discourse and forum in which to discuss them, and a framework in which to profile their generic skills *in situ*. The profile approach is at odds with the policy discourse that describes generic skills as distinct entities that can be 'assessed' generically. It allows for the continuous development of generic skills throughout life by pointing to a portfolio approach to skills identification which allows each person to provide a profile of their skills within a context, and a basis on which to relate this profile to new contexts.

### Skills identification training

The positive responses of focus groups and interview participants to discussions about their generic skills suggests that there would be value in explicit training along these lines. The VET system should therefore consider including a structured approach to teaching people the *discourse* and *language* of generic skills and assisting them to develop a portfolio (or profile) of their generic skills which brings together what they have learned through domestic and community activities, as well as throughout the phases of their working lives. The task is one of identifying skills developed *in situ* and recognising their global classification into generic skills relevant to different workplaces.

The value of group activities and opportunities to discuss generic skills, attributes and employment issues was confirmed in this study. Focus groups were extremely lively as participants willingly shared their perceptions and experiences in relation to the nature of generic skills, their development and application. As one participant said, 'This is what we need more of … thinking about my generic skills has given me more confidence in finding a job'.

A union job placement officer commented:

> What I've found with my experience of people who have been retrenched from the … Bank, is that these people on the whole have worked for the bank for a great number of years and have numerous skills that they themselves are unable to identify. And there is no bridge or source between the termination of their employment and them entering the job-seeking market that enables them to identify these skills that they have accumulated or acquired over the years, and then use them in marketing themselves for a new job.

## Employability issues—the challenge for the VET system

Complicating the burden on displaced workers and the workforce generally is the investment (or gamble) job seekers need to make in deciding what skills they should develop to increase their employability. As noted earlier in the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry–Business Council of Australia report (Curtis & McKenzie 2001), the term 'employability' implicitly suggests that the onus of responsibility for gaining employment rests with the individual rather than with the labour market. This is hardly surprising given the trend in public policy more generally towards individualising responsibility for social services (such as health and education) that were formerly thought of as mainly a public or social responsibility. In the wider labour market individuals are increasingly expected to take responsibility for planning and driving their career paths in a context of change, uncertainty and work insecurity. A majority of the displaced workers that contributed their experiences to this research were taking responsibility in that they were actively seeking re-training and re-employment. However, the barriers preventing them from finding work were, for the most part, factors that were unrelated to their generic skills and factors that were beyond their control.

While it is clear that there are some factors over which the individual does have some control, the conundrum lies in the fact that, in a given context, the individual does not control most of the variables that determine his/her employment prospects. The state of the local labour market,

the capacity for mobility, levels of investment and community infrastructure, industry and regional policy and so on, all contribute to determining the employment prospects of individuals. Buchanan et al. (2001) call for 'place' to be factored back into the discussions on VET policy and labour market analysis. Billett et al. (1997) have similarly called for recognition of regions and communities as legitimate stakeholders in VET policy. Hence the tendency to conceptualise 'employability' as an individual phenomenon contradicts significant research that highlights 'employability' as a consequential or dependent variable. It is contingent upon a multiplicity of factors in the real-world context in which individuals may find themselves. While individuals may do everything within their power to be work-ready and employment-oriented, in truth the status of their 'employability' is not entirely within their own domain. Within that context, the discourse of 'generic skills for employability' does have some value, in that individuals, including displaced workers, might in certain conditions increase their chances of finding employment if they have well-developed generic skills coupled with the confidence and the ability to identify and consciously transfer them to new contexts. The VET system can make a contribution.

The challenge for VET is to address the needs of displaced workers by providing them with opportunities to:

- recognise and articulate their generic skills and to learn to transfer them to new contexts
- develop resilience in the face of rejection
- refine and adapt their generic skills to respond to the employment market.

## What the education and training system can do

The experience of this project demonstrates that support groups, re-training classes and good teachers or placement counsellors can support people through crises of unemployment and assist them to become more resilient through training and establishing support networks. Support people explained the nature of their work in terms of providing an empathetic and positive environment, assisting people to set life goals and to recognise the wider value and applicability of their skills. The example of the DOME (Don't Underestimate Mature Expertise) agency is discussed below and is further elucidated in the case study in appendix A. It provides a model of the kind of service for displaced workers that is successful on a number of levels. Another case study gives an example of the work of an employment officer involved in the process of assisting displaced workers to re-identify themselves and their skills in the current workforce. Both examples demonstrate a broadening of vocational services in response to the new workforce and the requirements of lifelong learning. At the moment those services are outside the VET system and considered peripheral to it. However, it should be argued that displaced workers are a legitimate entity within the workforce and therefore come within the ambit of the education and training system. Moreover, the broader community and capacity-building role of VET entails responsibilities that move beyond the interests of employers and their employees. Our research suggests that displaced workers need systemic support beyond the self-help and happenstance arrangements that currently prevail.

### *Support groups and networks*

In seeking ways to assist older unemployed workers to re-enter the workforce, the education and training system needs to offer training which addresses the psychological impacts of unemployment as well as skills development. In this study, ample evidence was found of the importance of group processes and skillful leadership. As one person enrolled in a TAFE college Job Futures group said:

> There's 20 of me, there's 20 other people here in the same boat as me. Whereas two weeks ago, I was sitting at home, in my home, thinking it was only me. There's 20 odd people. I can come in here, with [the teacher] taking it, I find her a very motivating woman, being able to help us in that way. I can talk to people, I've got 4 weeks to talk to people, hopefully build my confidence back up because it's shocking, totally, and I can't believe in such a



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> short time that it's been shot so much … So at least I'm a little bit more prepared to be able to get out there and say 'Ok I'm not going to be able to get a job unless I go and do a course. Like they've said … I may be able to get that position there with what I've got'. Whereas before I was just locked in four walls.

The work of the voluntary support organisations such as DOME and '45 Plus Workforce', the support and placement functions of unions such as the Communications, Electrical and Plumbers Union, Textile Clothing and Footwear and Finance Sector Union and TAFE re-training classes, all indicate that there are a number of strategies that work for older displaced workers. The example of DOME (see case study in appendix A) illustrates the advantage of services that integrate a number of functions:

- opportunities for re-training in new skills such as information technology which are now prerequisites for most work, or in new skills that will enable people to live a more productive life while unemployed
- job placement services that highlight the benefits that experience and maturity bring to workplaces
- a place where older displaced workers can meet to share their stories, to support and learn from each other
- career counselling to help people find new pathways to work or else to satisfying unpaid work
- counselling to help workers overcome the trauma of sudden job loss and to build their confidence in order to re-join the workforce or find satisfying voluntary activities if this looks to be unlikely.

The example of the Brisbane placement service (see case study in appendix A) also suggests that skills in marketing themselves, and in terms of sales and services generally, are essential generic skills in the current employment situation. Experience of these placement officers suggests that focussing on specific jobs, with a direct 'sales' approach, is a better strategy for older workers than using written applications to advertised positions.

The VET system could find ways to encourage the integration of these strategies across a number of programs (in adult and community education, TAFE and private providers) and hence provide support to those displaced workers who are able to re-enter the workforce and those who are not.

### *An orientation to lifelong learning*

The burden of responsibility for employment and career pathways rests increasingly with individuals. This implies a need for opportunities for learning and skills renewal to be made widely available, and also for the *culture* or *discourse* for lifelong learning to be popularised so that individuals are prepared to take up that responsibility in an ongoing way (ANTA 2000). Educational provision in the workplace and in the community through both the VET and adult and community education sectors needs to both reflect and advocate for notions of lifelong learning. This implies a shift from a narrow focus on entry-level training and customised skills on the part of employers, to more broad-based training and greater availability of a range of education and training at the community level.

As another union job placement officer put it:

> One of the things that I think that the government has been doing with vocational education is that it's been focussing on encouraging employers to train their staff and a lot of focus has been on entry level as you know, but I think there needs to be more sort of community education about the importance of lifelong learning and … directed not to the employer, but directly to the employee … when I tell people about getting themselves educated, no one has ever said that to them before and yet from my perspective … looking at the industry and how the world operates these days, to me it's like a fact that you've just

> got to think about your training and education and you've got to think about 'what do you need to stay employed for the long term', but people don't know that.

An orientation to lifelong learning in the way training is promoted and provided is just one approach that would assist people to build on and develop themselves as lifelong learners, equipped not only with a range of transferable, generic skills, but with a love of learning and confidence in their ability to go on learning. A review of learning access, when considering displaced workers, would reveal barriers that exist to:

- the recognition of skills through recognition of prior learning processes (time and cost barriers)
- accessing skills updates that represent gaps in an individual's curriculum vitae (time barriers).

Consideration could be given to providing more 'shop-front' training venues where learning is cheap, flexible, immediate and available at out-of-hours times. Education and training services to displaced workers could provide course components for those seeking particular input in order to adapt skills they already have. An urgent plea for inexpensive and accessible recognition of prior learning services was repeatedly heard. A positive response to these suggestions is important for the wellbeing of the lifelong learning agenda as well as that of displaced workers.

### Towards a 'multi-aged' work force

The respondents to this study have reported what seems to be an inability on the part of some employers and employment brokers to see beyond the immediate, and to take into account their longer-term interests in terms of the mix of skills in the workforce they are engaging. This is particularly evident in the overwhelming evidence in our data of systemic discrimination against experienced older workers in favour of younger, inexperienced workers, confirming the findings of the recent report on older workers and training barriers (Wooden et al. 2001). Displaced workers as young as 36 reported being sidelined in the job market. They spoke of difficulties in securing interviews and jobs owing to their age. This flies in the face of the government's agenda to raise the retirement age and encourage people to stay in employment longer. The culture of the moment appears to be the culture of youth, the X Generation taking over from the rapidly ageing baby boomers and their parents. The issue of image may be an important one in an age of logos and fast-culture consciousness. Younger applicants could be seen by employers to be more flexible, more adaptable, more pliable and more systems-savvy than their older colleagues. The issue of 'fit' cannot be discounted, and employers will inevitably choose employees whom they see as fitting in and promoting their workplace culture. Generic skills have always been defined with reference to particular social and historic times so that the generic skills of each generation and cultural group are somewhat different. However, an imbalance in favour of youth comes at a considerable price. Our participants have raised issues of loss of institutional memory, loss of expertise and loss of valuable opportunities for mentorship and 'community-building' within workplaces: 'An education campaign is needed amongst employers and human relations managers to raise their awareness of the benefits of maintaining a mix of age groups in workplaces'.

## Implications for professional development in VET and further research

The findings of this study clearly indicate that, while most people had undertaken recent post-school training, on the whole, a discussion of generic skills and emphasis on the development of these skills were not part of that training. If this is to change, many VET teachers will need staff development to assist them to accommodate the change. This is an urgent call to the education and training sector and one which could draw a range of responses. There are implications for teacher training and particularly for the Certificate IV and the Diploma in Assessment and

Workplace Training. Further research is needed to determine and articulate a strong methodology to integrate experiential learning and generic skills development into training programs. We propose that a series of participatory action research projects with VET teachers would be beneficial.

Such an approach could be initiated with real learners, apprentices, trainees, displaced workers and mature-age learners. Collaborative approaches to skills identification, recognition and re-packaging should be trialled, evaluated and documented. Multiple forms of portfolio development could evolve and other creative methods of demonstration for skills and knowledge might be realised. Not all forms of knowledge and skill sit comfortably within the covers of a manilla folder or clip-ring binder, and language and print-based methodologies will inevitably serve to disadvantage some groups while advantaging others. Action-research strategies provide established and rigorous methodologies for researchers, practitioners and learners to work together to address such issues. Existing models of good practice could be replicated, adapted and disseminated. This would provide the public domain with the results of a series of contextual and reflexive exemplars that would identify ways of integrating the development of generic skills into VET training programs, and industry training, and describe ways in which people can be assisted to develop portfolios of their generic skills.

A similar approach would also assist employers to identify the ways in which their enterprise can provide an environment that encourages both the demonstration of the latent or hidden skills of their workforce and the ongoing development of the generic skills across their workforce. Employers need to understand how their work practices, relationships and environments can become hubs for learning and production improvement. If a participatory action research project that brought together VET teachers and employers/enterprises were initiated, both outcomes could be realised conjointly.

Finally, an opportunity exists to conduct a longitudinal study with a large number of the participants in this study. Many expressed an interest in being involved in any future study and signed a release to allow the retaining of their identity and previous data (survey and interviews) for such a study if it were to eventuate.

Such a study, in 2–4 years' time, would enable the participants in this study to reflect again on how their generic skills have developed since the first interview/focus group, to what extent their generic skills have been important in subsequent employment, and how useful it has been for them to identify what their generic skills are.

# Conclusion

This research has illuminated the extent to which generic skills are the 'skills' of life; abilities developed throughout life through experience within family, school and community settings. Most importantly, however, these skills are also developed through multiple involvements, responsibilities and activities within the workplace. The culture, the discourse and the 'community of practice' in the workplace shape the development and demonstration of these skills. The study suggests the importance of permanent work, and the need to reconceptualise and recognise experiential and informal learning as central and valued elements in the VET system.

The study revealed how displaced workers, mostly 'older' and relatively experienced people, have a rich repertoire of generic skills. While these skills may enhance 'employability', they offer these workers no guarantee of continuing employment or job security. Our participants have shown how their skills—including their generic skills—were only one factor in a complex web of factors shaping their employability. Most of these factors are outside their control and thus, to a substantial extent, their 'employability' is also outside of their control. 'Employability' is ultimately determined by employers.

We began with an appreciation that the key competencies had their origins in analysis of the school-to-work transition and the needs of youth. This study was not looking at the point of entry to the labour market and the workplace. We were interested in what was happening further down the track—indeed, for some of our participants, it seemed they had reached the end of the road. Having run out of road well before their journey has ended, they are left to find, or make, their own paths. Despite their repertoire of generic skills, not all are well equipped with the navigation and 'survival' skills they require now.

The need for 'new' generic skills for displaced workers has been highlighted: skills in self-advocacy and self-reliance, in marketing and entrepreneurialism, skills in life planning and goal-setting, skills that are not captured effectively in the now traditional framework of key competencies (Mayer 1992). The processes of redefinition—of skills, of employability, and of the employment relationship—have raised employers' expectations. While such expectations extend the lists of requisite generic skills, the study has also shown that, in a sense, the lists will be infinite. At the grounded, practical level, employers are only interested in the particular generic skills that meet their unique requirements. In a sense these skills are not 'generic' at all, they are highly contextualised, situated and embedded. In order to make such skills 'generic', workers need to generalise from their particular experience and re-apply what they have learned in a new or different context. When these active processes of generalisation, abstraction and re-conceptualisation are well developed and performed skilfully, they create the appearance of easy 'transferability'. However, this may be an illusion and transferability cannot be assumed. This study has highlighted the value, particularly for displaced workers, of paying deliberate attention to active processes of transfer.

Importantly, the study also shows how generic skills are intimately bound up with values, personality traits and issues of identity. The capacity to present and sustain a workplace personality which appeals to the employer (and perhaps his/her customers) emerges as an

essential generic skill—if one wants to name it so. We might also say that cultivating the appropriate identity for the workplace is a continuing and substantial challenge. Yet no more so than that of identity maintenance and reconstruction for displaced workers whose sense of self is intimately tied to their former work.

In the context of an ageing population, expectations for lifelong learning and government policies to extend the working life, this research exposes the need to provide systemic support for displaced workers. The study revealed a distressing wastage of their knowledge, skills and accumulated wisdom. It is a wastage that no truly 'clever country' could ever allow.

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# Making experience work

## Generic skills through the eyes of displaced workers – Volume 2

genericskills

*Crina Virgona*

*Peter Waterhouse*

*Robin Sefton*

*Jill Sanguinetti*

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**Publisher's note:**

This report has been published in two volumes. Volume 1 contains the detailed report of this project. This volume contains the appendices, including the case studies which were documented by the study.

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# Appendix A: Case studies

## Stories of six participants

### Robert: School drop-out, pilot, boiler-maker, union leader, businessman

Robert is now a successful, self-employed businessman, aged between 36–40 years, who left school at 15. He got a job on a construction site as a cleaner on 12-hour night shift and saved a lot of money, which helped when he later shifted to Melbourne to take up an apprenticeship.

In his spare time he undertook training for his restricted pilot's licence which he attained at age 16. He saw this activity/training as being very important to the development of his generic skills. He recognised that the system checks that he had to run through before flying were crucial for safety reasons.

> … with the pilot's licence I think you understand like they teach you a lot about the systems when you are flying an aeroplane—this is how it works, this is the system, this is the way to cross-reference problems—but also what it taught me was that when you sat in the seat of the aeroplane and you're about to start the engine everything becomes so serious. It's serious business, it's not something you can play with—although I did when I got off the ground and got up in the air. That was my turn then, I could play. But when you are on the ground and you have a system to go through, that's what they taught me that things can be very serious and you must respect them. If you don't you know somebody else will get hurt.

It was the attainment of his pilot's licence that helped him to gain an apprenticeship as a boilermaker with the railways. 'At the interview they only talked about my flying. They didn't ask me anything else.'

As an apprentice boilermaker in the railways he was based in Melbourne, away from his home. It was the money he saved from his work on construction that made it possible for him to survive. He maintained that his apprenticeship was very important to the development of his generic skills.

> Well, the skills that you learned outside your trade is the ability to … deal with other people at different levels. I mean when you're a young apprentice, you look up at people and you've got to learn … so you develop a learning skill from then. When you get older and you get into the apprenticeship and you get say your third or fourth year you're already acknowledged to yourself as a competent tradesman. You actually recognise that yourself and also you recognise that you've got to send your skills the other way to younger apprentices and you learn, you have to deal with people on those jobs.
>
> … [your organisational skills are] … just beginning at the apprenticeship stage. Once you leave school and you become responsible for other people, whereas at [secondary] school you're not responsible for other people.
>
> I remember the day when someone gave me a younger apprentice and the foreman said 'Well I'll be … It's either the blind leading the blind or it's you've come good' [laughter] and I said 'I know, I know'. I remember that day.

> … but I think the important thing in doing my apprenticeship is that you learn the skill to learn from others and then, as I said, as you get on you learn to hand those skills back. And you learn to deal with people who are less skilled than you and you progressively develop this ability to allocate jobs very slowly and … to be able to get jobs done.

He saw the development of his generic skills as being a progressive development throughout his career—learning about systems, society, how things work, what makes people tick. While he had had a number of different jobs, they represented basically three areas of work—being a cleaner on a construction site (initial job), becoming and then working as a boilermaker (railways, electricity generation, construction, mining industry, food industry) and twice being self-employed, including his current occupation. While he saw self-employment as the culmination of his generic skills development where all his knowledge and skills had been brought together, honed and extended, he said that his time at a large public corporation was the real eye-opener.

> [When I got a job at Company X] I thought I had a secure job then. I thought great, I can live for the rest of my life comfortably now. But when they restructured … I quickly realised that things weren't all that safe and that you could never rely on anything and what really opened my eyes was when I got involved in the union and I realised that the union could in actual fact participate not to help people and it opened my eyes as to what was really going on and what people really wanted and how different people could manipulate things to suit themselves.

He then led a group of workers out of one union and into another that worked for a better deal for their members. He became a prominent spokesman and union representative within that union. Before this time he had seen himself as a quiet retiring sort of a person.

> I was very quiet. I was a classic example of someone who didn't want to be disturbed and was quite prepared to do his job but when you realised that's just not enough, then you've got to do something about it. So yeah, it was a massive eye opener for me I certainly have a different view of the world now after [that job]. That's for sure.

He saw this time as an important learning experience that made it possible for him to become a successful businessman.

> … had I just left [that job] without being involved in any form of … union activity … I don't think that I would have wanted to start a business. I think, it might have scared me a bit more. I think that really being involved in the union and hitting things head-on showed me that I not only can do these things but for other people [in that company] that were just frightened. I think …[that when they left the job] … cos they never had the skills that I had, they may be just frightened to start a business or get involved in anything. But certainly yeah, the union business was probably the most … [important] seeing it up-front, seeing what people were prepared to do and then translating those into the current business that I have. I think this is where it's been a success, knowing that people have different motives for different things. What I saw [in that job] was to some degree frightening, but that's the way it goes.

He considered that the skills he developed throughout his career were very important.

> I think every skill I've ever developed really was needed for the business, certainly understanding that different people want different things you know and everything—from sales reps … that want to sell you stuff that just isn't going to work—a lot of this sort of ability to handle these types of people certainly came from [Company X] and certainly came from my work skills but mainly from [that job] … the skills I developed there were absolutely necessary. The ability to be able to speak to people straight up, tell them exactly what I wanted without fear of offending them, the ability to go off and get things organised and also understanding that these people, whoever they are—and in the business we are dealing with councillors sometimes, we're dealing with different companies, we're dealing with all sorts of people and understanding their motives and what they want to do—those skills were certainly



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developed [in that company] and I don't think, I would have been able to survive in the business without those skills.

As an employer himself he had certain views about getting loyalty from staff:

> Well now that I'm an employer, I certainly look at things differently … I don't like to lie to people, if they come in here and I require their employment, I require them on the job, I don't lie to them. I tell them straight up, 'nothing is sacred, I can't guarantee anything, you may have a job for a week, you may have a job for two months, you may have a job for life' … I've seen employers offer all sorts of wonderful things in there and that's just bull-shit, that's just absolutely crap. I think the employers are the ones that need to be honest and stop offering things that they think they can do … If they [employees] know they've only got a job for six months they'll hand that loyalty out with no worries for six months and … because they'll know that [they'll say] 'Oh OK! I've got six months but I've got to go and look for something else' but a lot of employers are prepared to lie and cheat … So employers need to be more a lot more honest and I think that you know because employees, they rely on their wages from literally week to week. Now that I'm in business I see that, especially in the business I'm in, and I would never tell anyone they've got a job for life now, not the way things are going now.
>
> I've seen both sides of it now because I've been employed, I've been, in a sense, part of the surplus gang and been told lies … in all sorts of forms and I've been in the construction gang with small contractors and big contractors and I've seen the lies they hand out and the bull-shit they carry on with and if they want fair dinkum loyalty from their employees, they have to get fair dinkum first because the employee will look up to the employer … and unless they hand over the truth, the employees will just be upset all the time and they would just say 'Oh, I don't give a stuff, the boss doesn't give a stuff, they lie to us all the time' … The problem is a lot of jobs that the employers provide now are so short term that no one is interested in them. Nobody wants the short-term work, they want security of income for long term … the employer knows that if he says—'Look I can only offer you a job for four months …' or whatever, the employee would probably be looking for another job, and the employers says 'Well I may not get this guy for four months, he might leave in a month cos he knows that it's not [permanent]' so he's got to lie to try and keep him.

He admitted that gaining permanent employment is getting much tougher and he considered himself lucky to have had a good bit of his career in steady work. As he commented, in his time:

> Employees could rely on the fact that they could go and borrow money from the bank and buy a decent car or buy a house but now they can't. I don't know how some people survive. I supposed I got out of that. My work career was just at the tail end of that and it's just at the beginning you know the real sort of casualisation/part-time sort of attitude … I don't know how people are going to buy houses and that sort of stuff, I can't see it because they're just not going to be able to do it.

At interview he was highly articulate, able to communicate abstract ideas readily and analytical in his reasoning. He put a high value on his generic skills which he regarded as having progressively developed throughout his career and life. He rated himself very highly in all areas of generic skills except in the area of information technology, which he says he only learns and uses when it is unavoidable. He said that his work (particularly his union activities), hobbies and interests, insatiable curiosity about how things work (experience/self-taught), and friends who shared his interests, were his main source of skill. In terms of working with others and in teams, he maintained that this was a natural skill, not a learned one. He found it important to recognise and develop these traits and found that he was also good at leading others in a team situation. In talking about his ability to adapt to change, he said that he is good at it now, but never used to be. 'I go with the flow a bit more now'. Starting his current business required all his generic skills, including creative and innovative skills. 'I am good at understanding new ideas' he said.

## Ben: Roving manual worker, truck driver and occupational health and safety trainer

Ben dropped out of an apprenticeship as a young man and moved around Australia for 20 years, working in factories, farms, mines, and shops, on fishing trawlers and in the trucking industry. In 1999 he had an industrial accident resulting in 8 months in hospital, the loss of a leg and a lasting disability. No longer able to do manual work, he is training as an occupational health and safety officer. He has found that the generic skills he has developed over the years of moving from job to job, and the new skills he developed through the experience of his injury and hospitalisation are transferable to his new occupation of student and trainee trainer.

Changing jobs frequently meant that he constantly developed new skills and became adaptable to change:

> … the actual changing of jobs, going from one industry to another industry and using skills from one industry to another. I think I adapted new skills, which helped me no end.
>
> … I've done a big transition from working physically into an office, where I feel a little bit uncomfortable. Because of that [discomfort] I guess I've got to adapt that to be comfortable and I think that can only come through the time of working there, being aware of the problem.

He said that the transition from manual to mental worker has been helped by his 'mental ease' in working, and this in turn 'comes from being able to apply my hands, my physical parts of my body to the actual job'. This facility had been further developed by opportunities he had been given to moving around the one workplace and working with different machines and in different roles:

> Some places where I've worked actually utilised my adaptability on the machines by rotating me. But I found they didn't rotate everybody. They wouldn't give that opportunity to sometimes foreign workers who they thought might not be able to develop the skills because they're lacking in English capability, or the enthusiasm.

Working in mines has helped him to develop a lot of trust in other workers and also the confidence of being able to work in isolation:

> You become your own supervisor, and that sort of helps you in being able to … if you can control your work relationship you may be able to assist people in similar work or possibly explain how to do jobs to them.

Ben has good verbal communication skills, which he says he has developed largely in talking to non-English speaking people in the workplace:

> I found that I had to be tedious in my instructions, be precise, and talking with my hands, which I developed in talking with … working with [people] not understanding another language helped me to communicate.

Working in shops also taught him 'a different skill in communicating with people, being put in a different role … sometimes an obnoxious customer helped me to develop skills in being patient, same as being in hospital for a long time'.

From a young musician in a band he learned a deep appreciation of teamwork and the pleasure of working with a team which is working well:

> … if musicians that actually play one instrument and they play solo, but it sounds better when there's other accompaniment. The same as in the workplace, when you get, it's like running well, or like a machine as we call it.

Ben's accident has been an occasion for a big change in the direction of his working life and the development of new skills: 'patience to focus on keeping my mind active' and the skills of reading, research and internet research. In particular the accident gave him a 'passion' for teaching people safe work processes and accident prevention.

Ben is enjoying working and training as an occupational health and safety officer and is enthusiastic about his new career. Significantly, his re-training (in computers, Certificate IV in Occupational Health and Safety Trainer and Diploma of Occupational Health and Safety at a university) have been greatly facilitated by funds made available through his rehabilitation payout. Other displaced workers do not have the same access to free training in the new career of their choice.

## James: Teacher and organisational training consultant

James was a teacher in a community school for 12 years before taking a voluntary redundancy package in 1994. His story illustrates how generic skills are developed in the course of solving new problems and rising to challenges at work. It also shows that even an impressive range of technical and generic skills gives no guarantee of ongoing employment.

James went into commercial consultancy so he could 'learn new things' and experience new challenges. He sees the skills he learned as a teacher as vital for his new career in the commercial environment:

> Teachers ... have to be people who are very adaptable, have to learn new systems and make them work and have to do them with a minimum of resources and time to do it in, and it was these kinds of advantages, skill sets that the company I got recruited by were looking for and they saw in me ...

For the past eight years he has worked for several consulting firms but has been out of contract for three months, and is now 'under intense financial stress' while looking for another contract or alternative work. The market for training consultancies is currently 'very depressed' and at the moment:

> ... the situation is really tight, so if an employer is faced with a choice between me and a cutesy graduate with three years experience and a lower rate, I'm out. I mean, there is real serious discrimination against old folk like us ...

James developed his consultancy and technical skills through experience on the job: skills in writing technical manuals, providing training in a range of software applications; applying new technical and business knowledge, skills in 'organisational sensitivity', 'commercial competency', 'analysis and condensation of ideas and texts', 'identifying and developing relationships', 'organisational problem-solving'.

Despite an impressive range of generic skills and an impressive curriculum vitae, James has been unable to pick up further consultancies. The life of a contract consultant is a life on the edge:

> The whole thing is knowledge all the time, you've got to get the price right, you've got to get your quote right, you know it's like a race, if you jump too soon, you get disqualified and if you jump too late you lose and that's all very scary stuff you know.

## Irena

Irena is typical of many participants in this project who, having been made redundant after 22 years in one company, is poorly equipped to find new employment despite the generic skills that she has clearly developed throughout that time.

Irena lost her job from (a telecommunications company) nine months ago. She has applied for about sixty jobs since then but has not managed to get one interview. Irena does not have confidence in the skills that she does have and is pessimistic about her current situation. Like many others, her IT and administration skills were highly customised to the company systems and the training that she did there was never accredited:

> ... I was with [Company X] for 22 years, I'm 53 years old ... I left with [Company X] nine months ago, and just started looking for work three months ago, very unsuccessfully. I actually haven't got an interview, after sending away my resume and I'm feeling lost because

> in with [Company X] everything was formulated for us. Everything was set, we only had to fill in the missing bits and type in the data, we never had to actually even set up a letter for ourselves, everything was done for us, the format was already there, and even though we used a lot of skills in with [Company X]...

As complaints officer, Irena's main task was to engage with and attempt to placate dissatisfied customers. This task clearly called for a high level of listening, communication, negotiation, team work, systems and problem-solving skills:

> I did complaints, which needed investigation and liaising with the telecommunications department and trying to stop people from going to the media and that, because we got a lot of threats, and it was basically calming down customers who came in via letter internet or email. I have extensive knowledge of the company's billing system which is very complicated.

Irena had learned the skills of listening, allowing expressions of anger, and developing empathy in order to go to the 'next level' of analysing the problem:

> I know from my job as complaints officer, it is something very important, because the initial contact with the customer was to let them speak and yell and even become abusive, because once they find that the one person in [Company X] who would listen to their whole story and develop some empathy with them, a lot of the steam and everything went out of them, and then we went to the next level, we can look at what the problem is.

However, Irena does not believe that her skills can be related to another job. She believes that her skills are at once *too generic* and *too specific*:

> I've been looking for work long enough, to say that I feel my skills are just too generic, because looking in the paper, they want someone specifically do data entry high speed, or a specific computer program, whereas I know just a bit of everything, specific to the telecom situation, everything else is a bit here and a bit there ... it's age.

Coming from a non-English speaking migrant background, with no formal schooling beyond grade 5 and no formal qualifications, Irena's progression through the ranks of the company, from phone operator to complaints officer, suggests an innate ability to learn and to accrue a broad set of generic skills. These include high level interpersonal and communication skills, problem-solving, understanding systems (Company X's complex billing system) and using information technologies.

Without special assistance or re-training, however, her outlook for re-employment seems bleak.

In spite of having developed an impressive set of generic skills through years of employment, Irena is unable to gain the interest of potential employers. Her 'generic' skills do not seem to be 'employability' skills as such.

Her story also illustrates the kind of re-training and support services that are needed for people such as her to rebuild confidence in herself and to name her generic skills in such a way that they would be recognised and hence valued by potential employers.

It would be useful for her to:

- be given training in naming and acknowledging the generic skills that she has acquired throughout her lifetime of employment with company X.
- participate in some kind of confidence-building program to counteract the demoralisation she is experiencing at present
- do information technology training that would enable her to build on her existing information technology skills and to actively use the software itself, rather than work with templates
- receive support and assistance in resume-writing, interviewing and job-search techniques
- do additional training in conflict resolution and negotiation in order to build on and gain some sort of qualification in the skills she developed as complaints officer.



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## Rosemary

On the basis of Rosemary's qualifications and her generic, technical and personal skills, Rosemary would appear to be highly employable. Here in her words is the story of her struggle, as yet unsuccessful, to find work:

> I'm in my late forties, I'm 49, I've been looking for work for the last three years, I have been a mother for the last number of years, 8 years or so, stayed at home and looked after my children and did part-time studies. I had to delay entering the workforce by one-and-a-half years because one of my daughters had ear problems … I started work as a computer operator, so my whole working life has been IT [information technology], computer operating with the Department of Defence for five years, and the Department of Social Security for the next 7 years, so altogether 12 years in the public service. I worked my way up there from computer operating to senior computer operating, training people and users, and I also had a lot of courses with the government and I'm very grateful for that … then I moved from there to the retail industry which is [Company X], where I worked in problem analysis initially then went into programming: Cobalt programming and Basic and a couple of other programming skills there. I loved the job, it was a high component of IT, implementing programs, and writing and testing codes, training users and staff, buyers and suppliers to use the systems. I created the EFTPOS systems, the electronic data systems for suppliers, so [Company X] had all the technology by the end of 1991 and that's when the recession really hit Australia. [Company X] retrenched a lot of its staff. I was only there for seven years and many of us lost their positions, many of us were coming close to long service leave too. So from there I looked around for work, but I felt it was in my best interests to go to do studies … business studies, because I was mainly interested in that, because I thought of my future, and I don't want to do programming for all my life. I didn't have any qualifications behind me, it was only a high degree of initiative that got me there, but it was no longer appreciated by the industry anyway.

Building on an earlier TAFE library technician's course, Rosemary put herself through a business studies degree (in library and information management) in order to update her library qualification. Since then she has gained experience in short-term contracts as a children's librarian and TAFE librarian. However, she has been unable to find work due, she believes, to her being over-qualified (in relation to existing staff) and over-aged, combined with the recent trend towards cut-backs in library positions.

> Now I am a qualified librarian since 1997 and I find it difficult to get work because I'm either a threat to the workforce or there is no work because there has been a change with local governments … because there has been a turnover of staff there are amalgamations and so there was a flux … and there either wasn't any positions advertised. So I started applying for TAFEs and universities and only have seen advertisements in the last three months where my skills can be applied to libraries such as electronic data bases and all the software packages, whereas before … employers mainly wanted you to work as the circulation officer, where you don't require that much IT skills and a lot of those jobs are advertised as library officers, and it's just starting now, it's because the IT has caught up with people in the workforce or in many industries, because Microsoft has come in since 1997, and now Microsoft 2000, and the staff don't know how to use it, they don't know how to use Microsoft Access …

Rosemary sees her inability to find a job in the area she has qualified in as very much a question of her age:

> … probably three-and-a-half years ago it would have been my limited experience, because of a change of career direction … but I have had experience in the last two years … I would say it would have to be age. I applied for my own position, I had them all [the required skills and qualifications] … I created my own web page with limited knowledge, so I could only say the barrier now is age, because I am highly computer literate, I've got good communication skills,



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> in all aspects, face-to-face, telephone, good written and oral skills and problem-solving skills, my background has been a programmer … problem analyst and computer operator.

Rosemary possesses all the important generic skills and has relevant experience and qualifications. It seems that she is one of the ones who has fallen through the cracks, despite having re-trained and seeking additional support and resources through a support group for older workers.

In this case, it appears that no amount of re-training or generic skills identification would assist her to find work in her chosen career. Her problem is that she underwent re-training just at the time when the demand for librarians was shrinking through local government cuts, technology and the trend towards casual and contract work in libraries.

Rosemary would not be able to afford career counselling with a private agency to examine how her information technology, information management and business skills could be used elsewhere. However, it is just this kind of expert counselling (not made available through the Commonwealth Employment Service or job placement agencies) that she needs.

## Roy

Roy was one of ten participants in a focus group of DOME (Don't Overlook Mature Expertise) volunteers.

Roy's story illustrates the difficulties that people experience in attempting to move to a completely different area of employment—in this case, from tool-making supervisor to office worker. A large part of that difficulty seems to be not only the lack of relevant qualifications, but a lack of any kind of framework by which his generic skills could become transferable or be recognised as such, and the lack of an opportunity for work experience whereby his generic skills could be developed in the new context. (As in many cases, these difficulties seem to be exacerbated when the change in career direction is forced by injury or ill health.)

> I've been working mostly in the toolmaking field, done a bit of work as a supervisor of a fish cannery which is slightly out of my field. The last few years, due to a lot of family and external situations and work situations, my health deteriorated, particularly in the last job. I was in a foundry with the fumes and everything else that was going on there. Came very close to a couple of nervous breakdowns, and a lot of sinus trouble and other health-related issues that were affected by the job. So I thought 'well the best idea would be to get out while I still can', while I can still walk out. So I did that. Now I'm looking for a different type of work to get right out of that sort of industry completely, and get into maybe office work or something like that. And what I've done, I've come here to get some experience and rebuild my confidence again which was shot through the floor and try to get back into it again.

Roy has had 28 years as a supervisor in three factories and is also a lay church minister. He has rated himself highly on all of the ten skill areas contained in the survey. The main source of all his skills is 'work' or 'experience/self-taught', except for his communication skills which he said he developed mainly as a lay church minister.

He believes that the key to his being able to get into office work is to have the opportunity to gain some kind of work experience and some training:

> But now it's difficult getting into the industry because I haven't got the experience and it would be good if we could get access to different jobs where we could go into different jobs, get experience in those jobs, work experience in those jobs, so that we can make that change more easily. There's very few places where you can go in and, to get, whether they'll accept you, to get that training and that experience.

In fact, Roy is working full-time (voluntarily) with DOME as a job-placement officer, contacting employers, matching unemployed DOME people to jobs and following through to ascertain

whether or not the placement was successful. However, his experience as a job placement officer will not in itself get him an equivalent paid position. Roy said:

> There was a job in the paper last Saturday for a job placement officer. I thought 'this is interesting'. And when I started reading through I went 'ahh, good gracious me!' All the qualifications you needed to be able to do that was unbelievable ...
>
> There was one where you had to go out and interview employers and get, sort of prospective employers and then matching their needs with somebody that was going to do it and then following it through. I'd like to be able to do that! But I haven't got the qualifications to be able to do that job, but I'd like to ...
>
> If there was something I'd like to do, I'd like to be able to get in and say 'well look I've got this, this and this, can you give us a chance, I'm ready for training, I'll do other courses if I need to'. But get in there, get that experience in there, and do it. I'm sure I could do it. But I haven't got the chance.

Roy said that he is benefiting significantly from the supports and resources available at DOME and also from the work experience he has as a volunteer job placement officer. His need is not just for additional training in administrative and information technology skills, but for additional work experience in an office environment.

This suggests the need for a work experience/voluntary work scheme for older unemployed workers, along the lines of 'Work for the Dole'. A number of informants said they would like the opportunity to do voluntary work in particular contexts that would extend their skills and give them relevant experience in the kind of work they were looking for.

## DOME (Don't Overlook Mature Expertise) South Australia: Supporting and placing older unemployed workers

DOME is a not-for-profit employment organisation offering services to mature-aged (over 40) unemployed people in South Australia. It began as a voluntary organisation in 1981 when a small group of older unemployed people got together to assist others in a similar situation.

There are now approximately 2500 members who are older unemployed people seeking work. DOME receives a state government grant of $150 000 per year on the basis of per capita employment outcomes. There are three paid members of staff, including the chief executive officer, an employment officer and an administrative person. The vast majority of the job search, job placement, training, advocacy and support work is done by member volunteers. Approximately 80 volunteers work in the office for one or a few days every week.

Since its inception, DOME has seen over 13 250 of its members return to full-time work, and for the past decade, members have found employment at the rate of 1000 per year.

DOME's services include:

- a free service to employers looking to fill vacancies
- advocacy on behalf of older workers, and promotion amongst employers of the benefits they bring to the workplace
- job-matching of members with vacancies, recommendations to employers and follow-up monitoring to gauge the success of the recommendation
- job search training
- computer training
- motivational support

- opportunities for volunteering to develop the skills and disciplines of work in an office environment
- opportunities, through volunteering, for work experience in a busy yet supportive environment and hence to gain in skills, confidence and self-esteem.

The chief executive officer of Dome, Ms Sharon Davis, said in an interview that the voluntary work in the office is treated exactly like paid work so that people's experience of working will be like the real thing,

> We treat DOME as an office that people come to, to go to work. So our hours are nine to five, and we expect them to do those hours … and we also expect them if they go to lunch to come back on time, that there's always a person on the floor that can cover them on their breaks.

The positive and purposeful atmosphere of the DOME office was evident to the researcher, who, when she arrived at 9 am for a 9.30 focus group, found an office in full swing. There was a hum of activity as 20 or so people quietly went about their work on phones and in interview rooms. Some of the volunteer workers introduced themselves and spoke about their commitment to DOME, its achievements, and how their involvement had benefited them personally.

The chief executive officer commented:

> It's a very vibrant organisation, for something that is a not-for-profit charitable group. I come in at 7.30 everyday and I leave here quite late at night. I've always been an early person for work, I always like to have that extra hour to myself to do things. Well now I find half of them follow me in—both staff as well as volunteers.

The Job Network and the federal government have attempted to identify the reasons for the success of DOME in training and placing older unemployed workers. Central to the success of DOME seems to be the creation of a warm and empathetic community, a sense of shared ownership of the organisation and a strong ethos about the social value of their work—that every person placed in a job is a success shared by all.

> There's no secret. It's having empathy with the people, but it's having the people take ownership of what they're doing. It's no different from anybody wanting to help their fellow person. In the sense of saying, 'well I'm giving something back to the community, and OK, I might not get that job that I'm applying for but the person sitting in the next seat does, but I feel fantastic about it because that person's health is going to improve, their family life is going to improve, they're going to be working, they're putting money back into the economy'. All these other things are a flow-on effect when one person gets a job.

This seems to encapsulate what is special about DOME in combining the disciplines of 'real life' work, an empathetic environment, a sense of 'ownership' and a shared ethos which is about valuing every individual and celebrating every successful placement. In other words, DOME provides an environment in which the people are learning new skills and disciplines while being supported, knowing that their work is useful and appreciated and having a strong sense that *they are* the organisation.

Despite DOME's track record and reputation for supporting older displaced workers and placing them in jobs, its ability to expand and offer structured training to its members is curtailed by lack of funds. As a small, charitable organisation, it is not in a position to tender for Commonwealth job placement funds. This means that Job Network and other organisations who have people over 40 on their books and cannot place them, send them to DOME. However, the $4000–$9000 payment for the training and placement service goes to the other organisation, not to DOME.

The chief executive officer's vision for the future of DOME is for it to become a training school for the mature-aged:

> … in the sense, not as a education centre per se under the strict rules, but give them the same sort of skill training that we give them today, without the high pressure, where we can take

them through a multitude of different training programs, in the sense of work skill programs, but life skill programs, motivation, attitudinal. I'd like to be able to have the resources, the people on the floor that have those skills to groom them into these sort of things, to give us that added benefit. If I had, say, a psychologist, and a qualified trainer … I don't need many good people, but I need more. And then I think we would have a far greater output of outcomes of people getting jobs.

Participants in the focus group of 10 member/volunteers of DOME spoke from their own perspectives of how DOME had assisted them. For example:

> I'm literally at the stage of life where I've had to change direction, from being a hands-on painter, landscaping house presenter, things like that, in other words cut back the physical and move into office work. So I did some training on computers, then I came to DOME, and literally used DOME to build up skills, and to look at different directions to see which way I'd like to go. And it's been very good for that. I can pick roughly the area that I have a lot of interest in and will get a lot of satisfaction out of. So at the moment I'm looking for work in that direction. I've learnt skills like interviewing and job placement here. Excellent.

> I come from Romania … Since I've been here I've been doing some volunteer work in order to improve my skills and at the moment, I'm doing the part-time study at university—spreadsheets, Excel, and Access 2000 and so on. I've been involved with DOME since last year and I do really enjoy it working full time because even from this, I've really learned a lot of skills that I needed. So I'm also looking for part-time casual work as well.

> … but DOME's been good for me and I enjoy coming here. It's awful when you stop leaving the house. You don't actually realise you're doing it until you think gee … you become very isolated too.

## Job Placement Services in Brisbane: The skilled placement officer

In Brisbane, placement services have been drawn together with the assistance of government funds to deal with the Ansett collapse. Some of the placement officers were highly skilled and very successful in placing unemployed people of all ages in work. One of these, Marie, provided some important insights into the market and the techniques she has developed account for her success in placing unemployed people in new positions.

From Marie's perspective, employers are looking for a match of person and job. 'I would say it is 40% task and knowledge and skill but it is 60% who you are and will you fit in'. According to Marie, 'There are very few skills where it will shut the door if you haven't got it'. The emphasis is rather on who you are. She tells a heartening story to illustrate her point:

> Let me give you a classic example. 53-year-old on Workcover, highly specialised in radio and TV masts and all that technical stuff. Three employers in Brisbane total who might employ this guy. Major emotional breakdown. Put into psych ward for a while. Medication. Get the picture? Married. Little children. Just disaster. Big mess. We rang those three employers and talked to them and I only got him an interview with one. But he went along to see them and they rang me back and said that guy is brilliant. And I said, 'Yeah I know. He is just a delight, isn't he?' They said 'Yes, he's fabulous. We wish we could take him on but we just don't have a job'. Two months later they took him on. They met him and they liked him and they just thought he was the bee's knees. If he had just sent his CV it never would have happened. They've got to see the whites of their eyes.

It is what she calls 'that cultural fit type stuff' that got the job for this client and for most others she has placed also. Marie believes that the capacity to 'fit in' can override virtually any barrier. She mentioned a number of Workcover clients who had been successfully placed because they were able to establish a relationship with the new employment organisation. The 'cultural fit type' skills

bunch around the communication-related generic skills captured in the key competencies. These skills maintain their priority once a job seeker has secured work. When asked if there was one thing that would prevent people from getting work she answered:

> Yes it's the ability to manage relationships which is a combination of all this communication and working with others in teams and cultural understanding and all those thing. It's that. It's all that. [Those that don't have them] are the ones that drop in and out of jobs and keep bouncing back to me.

Questions of 'fitting in' are to do with identity and Marie was very skilled in assisting people to recognise who they are as employees, what employers are looking for and mediating between the two. This means, in part, coming to terms with selling as a personal orientation. Selling is a job seeker's skill. They need to be able to sell themselves in the tough world of the employment market. 'It is highly results driven, highly competitive and you do have to have a self-employed mentality. That's just a reality whether you like it or not.'

But they will also probably need this skill in their personal kit bag:

> What is very common is the ability to sell, yourself and anything. Selling is everywhere. It's in customer service, it's in banking … in every environment now just about, there is an element of selling somewhere. There is a general resistance amongst the unemployed, or those seeking career change, to accept that selling is not a dirty word.

Some areas of employability have escaped the attention of employees who have worked consistently with one employer. Many find themselves unprepared for the demands of the market, which has now shifted responsibility for skills, development and job readiness onto the individual. Marie has had some difficulty in convincing displaced workers that they need to take up this responsibility if they are to survive. To many, including Marie, this seems to be unjust, but their acceptance of this role is imperative to their employability in the current climate:

> A lot of people I deal with I do have to give them that shake up. It's not pleasant at the time but they have to learn it because … they are out-placed suddenly from a job … I had a lady recently, out placed after 17 years as a reception person in a particular organisation. Had worked on systems [particular to the organisation]. Hadn't got any skills in the way of commercially available software, hadn't thought about it.

Marie worked with this client to convince her to take responsibility for her skills because the market will not make space for the explanation of long-term company commitment or family responsibility: 'That was a painful exercise for her to own that and say "Some of this is my own fault. What was happening out there, I just cruised along"'.

According to Marie, this orientation to the employment market is developed in school. Marie attends a number of schools as a guest speaker helping them to prepare students for the job market. She has found marked differences between schools in the extent to which they develop skills of career management. She maintained that some schools encourage personal entrepreneurship while others 'just don't have a grip'. An employment environment such as this will inevitably create winners and losers. 'My concern is that there are some people in the community who don't have the personal ability to be self-managing. They simply don't have that skill.'

However, Marie's job is to ensure her clients are not in this category. She and her colleagues work with them over an extended period discussing questions of identity, reassessing their skills base, exposing their skills transfer and ensuring that this career change is a positive step in their lives. The starting point is what these people want from life and work and how they might realise their personal goals in the current work environment.

Marie and her colleagues demonstrate a sophisticated capacity to adapt their practices to accommodate the exigencies of the employment market. They have found a way of dealing with ageism that others have found to be the most insurmountable barrier. Marie uses an approach

particularly reserved for those over forty. 'I change from a more "do an application" technique to a marketing technique.'

She avoids advertised jobs where there will be hundreds of other applicants, many with youth on their side. Rather she works with clients on job readiness. She then gets them to identify work areas and to research companies that offer the type of work they are targeting. 'I think a lot of it is to do with people's ability to identify transferable skills and in the approach they make to the new employer.'

She assists job seekers in both areas. In particular she assists them to form relationships with employers. In preparing her clients to approach employers, the script goes something like:

> We realise you probably don't have a job but, do you mind giving me 10 minutes of your time to give us some advice … I would like to make the transition to your environment … how do I do it, what do I lack and a key question we ask is what do I have to be to be the next person you take on.

This may involve training and specialist knowledge. She explains the process further:

> That gets the client in front of the employer talking one to one with no competition … when that employer has a vacancy, guess who they remember, the person they spent time talking to. Doors open. It just happens and it's not hard. It's not rocket science.

Marie acknowledged the goodwill of employers who, when approached with sincerity, are usually very willing to make a contribution to the community by offering their time and a willing ear.

Marie's technique comes back to her central point, that employability is about fitting in and forming relationships between unemployed people and potential employers. However, the skills part of the equation must also be attended to. Marie has found access to training to address skills gaps presents the greatest barrier to employability. She has found that the VET system is not equipped to deal with targeted gaps in people's learning. A small skills gap may require only a unit in a course. However, the VET system advises enrolment in the whole course and cumbersome timetabling arrangements that do not accommodate the immediate urgency of job seekers. The same applies with recognition of prior learning: 'it would be quicker to do the course, cos they're hopeless'. In Marie's opinion there is a pressing need for specialised VET agencies catering for displaced workers and people in career transition.

It would appear that there are not many job agencies that have the market understanding that Marie exhibits, or the capacity to work with people at this level. According to one counsellor most people have to wait 3 or even 6 months before they join a group that can offer networks and support to restore their frayed self-esteem and assist them to map out realistic strategies that will get them back into work. In the case of workers displaced from Ansett, funds were available for this service. However, the cost of this type of service puts it beyond many ordinary displaced workers. Our informants reported that the services of placement officers were beyond the reach of the unemployed. According to our informants, many provide very limited assistance; others are prohibitively expensive.

This case study exposes a significant variance between the experience of job seekers and that of skilled placement counsellors. It suggests that many people in our sample were thwarted with experience that had taken a heavy toll upon their self-esteem and their capacity to be successful in the employment market. It indicates that competent intervention can be very productive both for older workers and for employers.

# Workplaces as learner environments: Case study of a laundry service

In most modern workplaces, 'silo' thinking is one of the challenges that managements seek to combat. Organisational structures made up of 'silos' encourage separate cultures to develop as employees identify with the interests of the unit rather than the interests of the whole. In contrast, modern workplaces try to be more 'organic' in the way the problems of one section may affect the whole organisation.

Each of these models calls for different kinds of generic skills amongst employees. While the 'silo' organisation might centre its decisions and structure around the individuals in the unit and the tasks to be accomplished, the more 'organic' organisation seeks an interchange between sections and a more open vision. The first may be self-protective but the second must open itself to change as the needs of the organisation adjust to market pressures. The second is systems-based and dependent upon the negotiation of conflicting interests and changing circumstances.

An ex-employee of an airline (a scheduler) talked about her experience of changes within the organisation which brought the two models into relief:

> A few years back there tended to be almost competition between some departments. 'We do this well and nobody else is going to impact upon it … we can provide the best schedule' for example. '… Well that's great … but it's not workable.' So then we'd actually try to get something that worked to meet the flight services budget that we could deliver and it would actually work for them as well. So you had to be able to look not just at your goals and your bottom line, you had to be able to take into account the other departments.

In this organisation, the desired generic skills are about systems thinking, adaptability and holistic vision.

The laundry at a large hospital provides an interesting case study of a 'silo' organisation which for years insulated itself against systems thinking and adaptability before changing. The laundry served the needs of a city hospital for many years quite adequately. However, the hospital was amalgamated into a metropolitan hospital and the laundry services were centralised. The 34 workers from the city hospital were displaced. The human resources manager was given the task of redeploying the displaced staff into jobs within the new amalgamated hospital. The human resources manager, Pam, tells the story of a work unit that was atrophied in the values and thinking of, maybe, 20 years ago when 'silo' thinking prevailed.

She said that at the city hospital, the work culture was, in many ways, benign. The manager knew each individual, their limitations, anxieties and special needs—the language groups, who liked to work with whom, the physical limitations experienced by employees, particularly as they got older, and the distaste that some had for body products. The manager was very approachable and made it a priority to ensure that employees were happy in their work.

Virtually all of the employees were from non-English speaking backgrounds and, for the majority, this was their first and only job in Australia. Most had limited schooling and poor English. As workplace environments had changed within industry, the laundry manager protected the workforce from demands that required employees to better understand the needs of their internal customers or that demanded the integration of quality, safety or work operation systems into the work practices of the laundry. Laundry staff had expressed distress when threatened with change, so the manager handled the onslaught from outside the unit and preserved the harmony within.

The sustainability of this culture, however, fell asunder when the employees were declared redundant and they found themselves in the employment market with few employability skills. On receiving their displacement letter, they were devastated, even though it promised their redeployment. Pam worked with each individual to translate their sense of devastation into a sense

of opportunity. She then set about coaching them in the language and culture of the workplace as a step in the transition process.

> … understanding systems? This was a huge problem I had … occupational health and safety and quality questions? This was really difficult because their understanding of that, [was] on a very basic level … you need to do your job well, you need to make sure it's safe … But this is the first they've ever been given any information on that in those terms. So the term 'occupational health and safety' is meaningless … totally meaningless.

The laundry workers had been taught itemised behaviour but they had no concept of framing work practices to meet organisational goals through systematic application. Their thinking was framed around themselves as individual operators:

> Working with others and in teams. I think that's fundamental, that definitely is a skill. But that was a question asked of a few of them in their interviews, 'What does team-work mean for you?', and well, taking into account the language issue, this was difficult for them, very difficult. Because they know their job, and they know that that person there needs to do their job, and their concept of teamwork is that as long as you do yours and I do mine, we'll be fine.

However, Pam coached each individual and prepared them for job interviews. She thought it should be like 'a dream come true for them' because: 'They would never have been given the assistance to [get a job] in the past, and going for an interview which no-one would've helped them with before'.

Pam managed to place each employee in work that they were happy to take up. Furthermore, she secured government funds to establish a workplace English language and literacy program aimed at improving basic communication skills within the protocols, systems and technology of the modern workplace.

From Pam's point of view the laundry had established barriers to the growth of its employees. Their skills were diminishing because they were protected from the influences of outside pressure. Information technology skills, group decision-making, broad-based communication skills and systems understandings would have helped to reshape the generic skills of laundry staff. Pam believed that the workplace has a responsibility to strategically develop these skills. She suggested that a healthy well-skilled organisation should coach and mentor to facilitate in individuals the development of social and intellectual capital and their capacity to self-realisation. She rejected the idea that individuals are singularly responsible for their own skill development:

> And I see that as everyone's responsibility … I don't know how anyone can possibly expect that they're just going to arrive with x set of skills. And that's also detrimental in terms of whatever happened to nurturing and coaching and mentoring the people around you. If you presume that they have the skills, then what are you going to give in terms of teaching others as well as learning from other people. I think that's a terrible philosophy.

In the current work environment where positions are no longer permanent, Pam noted a greater responsibility on the part of workplaces to keep skills current:

> The fact is that all of these people have said, 'Once I'm in this new job, I won't get displaced again will I?' Well I wouldn't dare ever make someone comfortable and secure and say 'Oh no, that'll never happen to you again'. I wouldn't have a clue. It could. It could happen two years down the track. Because it's changing so much, so surely it would be better to keep … these people trained … so that if and when that does happen to them, the transition's not too difficult because they have … grown within their own roles.

The case study of the hospital laundry illustrates how the workplace operates as a learning environment that may either facilitate or present barriers to the growth of generic skills.

# Appendix B: Research method

## Reference committee

A project reference committee was established to assist and guide the project. The very high calibre of expertise provided by this group of researchers and practitioners was invaluable to the research team in all phases of the project—the literature review, research design, trial, data collection, data analysis and critical review. This committee met several times by teleconference throughout the project and remained in contact individually by email with helpful suggestions, articles and constructive critique.

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## Research methodology

This study was essentially qualitative in nature, although the collection of some quantitative data was included in the research design. In essence, however, the research method involved capturing the stories and experiences of displaced workers in an attempt to illuminate the nature of generic skills, their development and transferability. While a survey instrument was developed and utilised throughout the study, it is important to emphasise that the main research 'instruments' were the researchers themselves. This approach is consistent with qualitative approaches to social and educational research as described by Caulley (1994) and Garman (1996) and with concepts of 'grounded theory' as discussed by Strauss and Corbin (1994).

A key benefit in utilising the researchers as 'human instruments' of the research process (Caulley 1994, p.5) is their capacity to be flexible and to adapt the research methods to shifting circumstances as the enquiry unfolds. As it turned out this was particularly necessary in this case. Thus, while there was an established research design at the outset of the study, it was necessary to make adjustments. Such adjustments were in keeping with the principles of 'emergent design' (Caulley 1994, p.11) for research and with the overall objectives of the project.

As a qualitative and interpretive study, it does not attempt to offer a representative sample of displaced workers from across the Australian economy. The sampling for this study was purposive—and to some extent necessarily opportunistic rather than random (see Caulley 1994). The survey data indicate certain trends in the acquisition and transferability of generic skills amongst displaced workers and supports the qualitative data collected from this group of participants.

## Research design

It was initially proposed to have three levels of data collection, a focus group discussion followed by the individual completion of a survey questionnaire and interviews with several of the participants. The interviews and focus groups utilised Field's (1991) iceberg diagram that provided a metaphor for generic skills as 'submerged' or 'underpinning' skills of which we are not always consciously aware. This provided a framework for interviewees and groups to explore the skills that gave them competence as workers or community members. The logic was that the discussion within the focus group would help to clarify and broaden the concept and understandings of generic skills and provide a common language or discourse for participants to take up in their responses and discussions. Answers to the survey questions, while also providing a range of useful and interesting data, would provide the starting point for a more in-depth discussion in individual interviews.

### Focus groups

The initial approach was to explain the project's purpose and the team's interest in 'general' or 'generic' skills. These skills were distinguished from technical or vocationally specific skills and aligned with notions of 'soft skills', 'people skills' and 'key competencies' such as 'communication skills' and 'problem-solving'. Participants were asked to identify and share the generic skills they had developed through their years of life and work experience. One approach was to ask participants about what it was (apart from technical or vocationally specific skills) that set them apart from younger people at the beginning of their working life. Another was to ask participants what they 'carry' with them from one job to another. Participants were invited to share and discuss their examples of these various skills, attributes, competencies or abilities. Issues of skills for employability and understandings of the transferability of skills were discussed.

## Confidentiality and privacy issues

Participants were provided with a letter guaranteeing that their information would be used in ways that ensured their privacy, anonymity within the final report, and confidentiality measures for the data they provided. They were asked to sign a release for the use of their information under these conditions and permission was sought for the use of recording equipment within focus groups and interviews.

## Data collection

Originally it was planned to conduct focus groups and complete survey questionnaires with 200 participants, and to interview approximately 30 people. Several factors intervened to make this inappropriate:

- The organisations originally targeted for data collection were found to be dealing with largely the same constituents, thus narrowing the sample. While a narrow focus would have provided an in-depth analysis of a range of workers from one industry, it would not provide the data necessary to meet the project brief.
- Many agencies dealing with the target group of displaced workers were working with them individually and the arrangement of focus groups proved impossible. However, access to individuals was possible, once confidentiality arrangements were approved by the agency.
- Some agencies initially involved found it impossible to participate for a number of reasons that were quite outside the project and withdrew from participation.
- The negotiations with some agencies and organisations became so drawn out that the project moved on without including them in the data collection.

Through the use of networks, a new set of agencies was contacted and, where possible, focus groups were arranged. These were only possible where a group of unemployed/displaced workers were already together as a group for some purpose. In some cases these were support groups that were facilitated by volunteers, for instance DOME in Adelaide, and the 45+ Workforce group in Melbourne. Others were instituted by employment placement officers for a particular group of displaced workers. In one case, a class within a VET provider was utilised and in other cases, a union had gathered groups of their displaced members for retraining and/or credentialing purposes.

Contact with individuals was made through referral from employment placement officers who gave their clients a flier about the project, explained it to them and asked if they would participate. If they agreed, the researcher would conduct the interview at the placement agency. In one case, the researcher spent many days at one agency, talking to staff and clients, and asking people if they would mind taking part in the project, as well as conducting interviews with clients who were referred by the staff. This allowed a broader sample in this area of people who had only come in to fill in forms, rather than talk to staff.

Efforts were also made to include participants who had made a successful transition back into employment following displacement from the workforce. This was achieved through personal networks. However, the principal source of data was displaced workers who were currently unemployed. Consultants working with this group of people also offered a valuable source of information. Their input was sought through interviews or especially convened group discussions. In many cases it was only possible to interview displaced workers individually, as they were not part of any support network.

Although there was an effort made to broaden the sample, this was achieved through the use of networks that were not necessarily representative of the wider community. The sample was in this sense opportunistic rather than purposive. The purpose of the study was to utilise diverse

experience and understandings to illuminate the topic of generic skills, not to provide a definitive set of statistics representative of the broader community.

These factors impinged on the established research method and required some adjustments to be made. In particular, dealing with participants who had not taken part in a focus group meant that some of the focus group activities needed to be conducted with each person. This was achieved by a brief introductory discussion of Field's 'iceberg' and the list contained in the survey. The survey questionnaire was then used as an interview instrument, with the researcher filling it in and asking the questions, with appropriate follow-up questions, and making extensive field notes of both the discussion that emerged and the important points that might be re-discussed in the taped interview that followed. This allowed the researcher to gain a quick and in-depth understanding of the participant's background, experience and concerns, and provided a sound basis for discussion. Permission was then asked to turn on the tape recorder and, if given, a taped interview followed.

## Data analysis

A database of responses to the survey questionnaire was established using Microsoft Access. Transcripts were made of taped focus groups discussions and individual interviews. Researchers developed a range of case studies of individual participants that encapsulated the range of responses from the survey, field notes and interview data. Case studies of some focus groups were also developed from the data and transcripts were made of interviews and focus groups with facilitators of groups/placement officers.

The research team then analysed their findings in relation to the research questions and identified significant issues and trends that emerged from the data.

# Appendix C: Composition of the sample

**Table 1: Age of participants**

| Age group in years | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 16–20 | 3 | 2.4 |
| 21–25 | 3 | 2.4 |
| 26–30 | 3 | 2.4 |
| 31–35 | 9 | 7.1 |
| 36–40 | 13 | 10.2 |
| 41–45 | 15 | 11.8 |
| 46–50 | 32 | 25.2 |
| 51–55 | 25 | 19.7 |
| 56–60 | 17 | 13.4 |
| Over 60 | 6 | 4.7 |
| Not stated | 1 | 0.8 |
| **Total** | **127** | **100.0** |

**Table 2: Gender**

| Gender | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 77 | 60.6 |
| Female | 50 | 39.4 |
| **Total** | **127** | **100.0** |

**Table 3: Country of birth**

| Country of Birth | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Australia | 90 | 70.9 |
| Other – ESB | 20 | 15.7 |
| Other – NESB | 17 | 13.4 |
| **Total** | **127** | **100.0** |

Note: ESB – English speaking background
NESB – non-English speaking background

**Table 4: Highest level of schooling completed**

| Level completed | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Grade 6/Year 7 | 1 | 0.8 |
| Form 2/Year 8 | 4 | 3.1 |
| Form 3/Year 9 | 7 | 5.5 |
| Form4/Year 10 | 31 | 24.4 |
| Form5/Year 11 | 36 | 28.3 |
| Form 6/Year 12 | 46 | 36.2 |
| Not stated | 2 | 1.6 |
| **Total** | **127** | **100.0** |

**Table 5: Age left school**

| Age left school | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 14 years | 3 | 2.4 |
| 15 years | 25 | 19.7 |
| 16 years | 27 | 21.2 |
| 17 years | 39 | 30.7 |
| 18 years | 26 | 20.5 |
| 19 years | 3 | 2.4 |
| Not stated | 4 | 3.1 |
| **Total** | **127** | **100.0** |

**Table 6: Post-school training and education courses**

| No. of courses | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 0 | 26 | 20.5 |
| 1 | 30 | 23.6 |
| 2 | 16 | 12.6 |
| 3 | 11 | 8.7 |
| 4 | 15 | 11.8 |
| 5 | 12 | 9.4 |
| More than 5 | 17 | 13.4 |
| **Total** | **127** | **100.0** |

**Table 7: Post-school training and education courses—place and completion**

| Place of course | Number of courses | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number of completed courses | Number courses not completed &/or current study | Completion not stated | Total listed courses | |
| | | | | *No.* | *%* |
| University | 46 | 14 | 0 | 60 | 20.2 |
| TAFE | 70 | 16 | 1 | 87 | 29.3 |
| Other institutions | 11 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 3.7 |
| Adult & community ed | 5 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 2.7 |
| In-house | 122 | 0 | 1 | 123[1] | 41.4 |
| Overseas | 7 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 2.7 |
| **Total** | **261** | **30** | **3** | **297[2]** | **100.0** |

Notes: [1] A number of people had unrecognised in-house qualifications
[2] Note that most participants attempted more than one course

**Table 8: Year of completion of last course for each participant**

| Year of completion | Number of participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 2000–2002 | 51 | 52.6 |
| 1995–1999 | 22 | 22.7 |
| 1990–1994 | 5 | 5.1 |
| 1985–1989 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 1980–1984 | 7 | 7.2 |
| Before 1980 | 12 | 12.4 |
| **Total** | **97** | **100.0** |

**Table 9: Types of courses people listed**

| Site of course | Details | Examples of courses |
|---|---|---|
| University | Degree | BA; B. Business Administration; B. Business; B. Education; B. Engineering (Electrical); B. Engineering (Electrical/Electronics); B. Engineering; B. Science; B. Social Science (Ministry); B. Theology; CPA (Certified Practising Accountant) |
| | Higher degree | BA (Honors); BA Geography (Honors); B. Architecture (Honors); B. Science (Honors); MA (Occupational Psychology); MA (preliminary); M. Adult Vocational Education & Training; M. Business; PhD |
| | Grad dip/cert | Grad. Cert. in Adult Literacy & Basic Education; Grad. Dip. Internet & Web Computing; Grad. Dip. Education; Grad. Dip. in Technical Education |
| | Diploma | Dip. of Adult Education; Dip. of Business Studies; Dip. of Civil Engineering; Dip. of Community Service; Dip. of Education; Dip. of Electronics; Dip. of Marketing; Dip. of OH&S; Dip. of Technology Management; Dip. of Training & Development |
| | Certificates | Advanced Cert. of Landscape Design & Construction; Cert. in Teaching a Second Language; Cert. IV in Workplace Training & Assessment; Cert. of Technology; Cert. Technology Management; Fitness Instructor Certificate; Teaching Certificate |
| | Short courses | CPA; Funeral Management |
| TAFE (includes private providers) | Apprentice | Aircraft structures; Boilermaker; Butcher; Electronic Mechanic (computers); Fitting & machining; Fitter & Turner; Framer; Gardening (Nursery person); Graphic Reproducer; Motor Mechanic; Qualified Chef; Technical Telecom; Trade Proficiency Certificate (Nursery person) |
| | Certificate | Advanced Cert. in Business Catering Operations<br>Advanced Cert. in Parks Operations<br>Advanced Cert. of Landscape Design & Construction<br>Advanced Cert. of Music Performance (Jazz/Popular)<br>Cert. Black & White Photography<br>Cert. I, II, III & IV in Occupational Health & Safety<br>Cert. II in Business (Small Business Traineeship)<br>Cert. II in Commercial Cookery & Hospitality<br>Cert. II in Hairdressing<br>Cert. II in Retail<br>Cert. III in Business (Office Administration)<br>Cert. in Childcare<br>Cert. in Estimating<br>Cert. in Hospitality<br>Cert. in Hospitality & Tourism (Front Office Operations)<br>Cert. in Human Resources<br>Cert. in Remedial Massage<br>Cert. in Secretarial<br>Cert. in Supervision<br>Cert. in Textile Technology<br>Cert. in Warehousing & Distribution<br>Cert. IV in Business Studies (Travel & Tourism)<br>Cert. IV in Electronics<br>Cert. IV in Social & Community Services (Disabilities)<br>Cert. IV in Workplace Training & Assessment<br>Cert. Level II & III Firefighter<br>Cert. of Applied Science<br>Cert. of Business Studies<br>Cert. of Catering<br>Cert. of Commercial Studies<br>Cert. of Farm Management<br>Cert. of Logistics Management<br>Cert. of National Teaching & Learning Strategies |



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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| TAFE (includes private providers) cont. | | Cert. of Small Business Studies (Book Keeper/Clerical) |
| | | Cert. of Technology |
| | | Cert. of Technology (Survey Drafting) |
| | | Cert. Technology (Design Drafting Mechanical) |
| | | Cert. Technology (Electronics) |
| | | Cert. Technology (Telecommunications) |
| | | Higher National Cert. in Engineering |
| | | Higher Technicians Certificate |
| | | Horticulturist Certificate |
| | | IATA Certificate (Travel Agent) |
| | | School Certificate |
| | | TV/Video/Audio Technician's Certificate |
| | Associate diploma | Assoc. Dip. (Technical Officer) |
| | | Assoc. Dip. Business Studies (Accounting) |
| | | Assoc. Dip. Electronics |
| | | Assoc. Dip. in Travel & Tourism |
| | Diploma | Commercial Diploma |
| | | Diploma Business Studies |
| | | Diploma in Hotel Management & Catering |
| | | Diploma in Workplace Training & Assessment |
| | | Diploma of Education |
| | | Diploma of Primary Teaching Education |
| | | Diploma of Teaching |
| | | Diploma of Travel & Tourism |
| | Construction tickets | Advanced Rigging; Advanced Scaffolding; Asbestos Removal; Crane Operator; Dogman; Elevated Work platform; Forklift; Winch Operator |
| | Short courses | Alpine Technician Course |
| | | Basic & Interim AutoCAD |
| | | Basic Computers |
| | | Black & White Photography |
| | | Cert. III AIN |
| | | Computer Skills |
| | | Electronics |
| | | Farm Bookkeeping |
| | | Pneumatics & Hydraulics (levels 1&2) |
| | | Preparation for Employment Training (PET) |
| | | Service of Alcohol |
| | | Small Business Studies |
| | | Women & Work |
| | | Wool Classing (Owners) |
| | | Word Perfect |
| Other institutions | Psychiatric Nursing Agency | Aggression Prevention Management |
| | | Train The Trainer |
| | Food Craft Institute | Diploma in Hotel Reception/Bookkeeping |
| | St John's Ambulance | First Aid Course |
| | Adelaide Hospitality & Tourism | Cert. Hospitality & Tourism (Front Office Operations) |
| | Red Cross | Workplace First Aid |
| | Technical College | Higher National Cert. of Engineering |
| | South Australia – Road Transport Training | Semi-trailer (H.A) & Forklift License |
| | Aero Club | Pilot's License (Restricted) |
| | Flying School | Commercial Pilot's License |
| | Drake Training | Intermediate Microsoft Access 2000 – Statement of Attendance |
| | WEA | Cert. in Windows 98 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| In-house | Airlines | Aircraft Endorsements (to pilot's licence for F27, DC9, 737, F28, A320 aircraft) |
| | | Aircraft Engineering |
| | | Cabin Manager Training |
| | | Dangerous Goods |
| | | Emergency & Customer Relations |
| | | First Aid (Level 2) |
| | | In-Flight Service |
| | | LAME Proficiency on Aircraft types |
| | | Licenses Aircraft Maintenance Engineer (LAME) |
| | | Management (short courses) |
| | | Occupational Health & Safety |
| | | Orientation (ground training) |
| | | Rank Leadership |
| | | Responsible Serving of Alcohol (RSA) |
| | | Safety & Technical Training |
| | | Simulator Proficiency |
| | | Targeted Selection Interviews |
| | | Ticketing Course |
| | | Annual License & Model Updating |
| | | Aviation Technician Apprenticeship |
| | | Technical Change |
| | | Annual License & Model Updating |
| | | First Aid |
| | | In-Flight Service |
| | Telecommunications | Certificate of Mobile Customer Care |
| | | Open Cable Registration |
| | | Apprenticeships – Technician |
| | | Telecom Mechanic |
| | | AXE Transmission/Supervision/OH&S |
| | | Cat. 5 Optical Cabling |
| | | Certificate II in Open Cable |
| | | CML/SDH/DSL Technical Training |
| | | COAX Cable Endorsement |
| | | Commissioning & Installation |
| | | Eligibility Cert. (Technical Officer) |
| | | Management |
| | | Open Cable |
| | | Presentation Skills/Rostrum |
| | | Team Leader Development |
| | | Technical & Supervisory Short Courses |
| | | Technical Officer Certificate |
| | | Telecom Switching |
| | | Telecom Transmission |
| | | Telecommunications Technician |
| | | Various in-house technical & supervisory courses |
| | | Various people skills & management courses |
| | Navy | Aircraft Electronics Technician |
| | | Clearance Diver (explosives/demolition) |
| | | General Seamanship (submarines) |
| | | Promotional |
| | Army | Commonwealth Explosives Certificate |
| | | Handling Dangerous Goods |
| | | Handling Dangerous Goods (water explosives) |
| | | Sergeant & Officer Training |
| | Hospital | Fire Brigade Training |
| | Safeway | Ezy Bank Training |
| | | The 'I Care' program |
| | Apprenticeships | Apprentice Mechanical Draftsman |
| | | Apprentice Textile Mechanic |
| | | Architectural Technician Apprenticeship |



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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| In-house cont | Certificates | Certificate in Textile Technology |
| | | Certificate of Technology |
| | Licenses | Heavy Vehicle License |
| | | Licensed Aircraft Maintenance Engineer |
| | Miscellaneous | Aircraft engineering |
| | | Anti-discrimination training |
| | | AutoCAD |
| | | Aviation medicine |
| | | Commissioning & installation |
| | | Computer training |
| | | Computer up-grade |
| | | Customer relations |
| | | Customer service training |
| | | First aid |
| | | Flower arranging |
| | | General industry course |
| | | Ikebana (Japanese flower arranging) |
| | | Internal bank training |
| | | Leadership – interpersonal skills |
| | | Logistics training |
| | | Management training |
| | | Middle management development |
| | | New world mapping system |
| | | Occupational health & safety |
| | | Presentation skills |
| | | Presentation skills/rostrum |
| | | Public speaking |
| | | QA auditor training |
| | | R.I.B.D Port 3 |
| | | Safety/emergency training |
| | | Sales training |
| | | Scotchworks negotiation skills |
| | | Targeted selection training |
| | | Understanding the requirements for ISO 9001, 9002 |
| | | Vocational guidance psychologist training |
| Adult & community education | Neighbourhood House | Computer Basics |
| | | Introduction to Computers |
| | | Introduction to 'Word' |
| | Adult Education Centre | Safe food handling |
| | SkillShare | Cert. II in Office Administration |
| | CentreLink | Required courses |
| Overseas | Romania | Certificate in Office Work |
| | United Kingdom | Apprentice Butcher – Certificate of Proficiency (Shop Butcher) |
| | New Zealand | Diploma of Fashion Design |
| | | Trade Certificate in Clothing |
| | Navy | General Seamanship (Submarines) |
| | USA | Occupational health & safety |
| | | Professional Cert. in Employee Assistance |
| | | Various human relations courses |
| Other | Licences | Commercial pilot |
| | | Fork lift |
| | | Heavy truck |
| | | Restricted pilot |
| | | Semi-trailer |
| | Certificates | Asbestos removal |
| | | First aid |
| | Computer | AutoCAD |
| | | New world mapping system |
| | | Upgrade courses |

**Table 10: Relevance of formal course to current employability**

| Site of course | Percentage of responses | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not at all relevant | | Neutral | | Very relevant | Not stated | Total |
| | *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* | | |
| TAFE (Incl. private providers) | 10.3 | 9.2 | 13.8 | 14.9 | 42.5 | 9.2 | **100.0** |
| University | 8.3 | 15.0 | 16.7 | 30.0 | 30.0 | 0.0 | **100.0** |
| In-house | 13.0 | 5.7 | 13.0 | 8.9 | 47.2 | 12.2 | **100.0** |
| Other* | 12.0 | 8.0 | 12.0 | 32.0 | 32.0 | 4.0 | **100.0** |
| **Total** | **11.2** | **8.8** | **13.9** | **17.0** | **41.0** | **8.1** | **100.0** |

Note: *Adult and community education, other institutions, overseas
Totals may not add exactly to 100 due to rounding

**Table 11: Number of workplaces of participants**

| Number of workplaces | Number of responses | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 33 | 26.0 |
| 2 | 20 | 15.7 |
| 3 | 15 | 11.8 |
| 4 | 19 | 15.0 |
| 5 | 8 | 6.3 |
| More than 5 | 32 | 25.2 |
| **Total** | **127** | **100.0** |

**Table 12: Number of positions held**

| Number of positions | Number of responses | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 9 | 7.1 |
| 2 | 23 | 18.1 |
| 3 | 21 | 16.5 |
| 4 | 23 | 18.1 |
| 5 | 8 | 6.3 |
| More than 5 | 40 | 31.5 |
| Not stated | 3 | 2.4 |
| **Total** | **127** | **100.0** |

**Table 13: List of positions held**

| Area of work | Examples |
|---|---|
| Agriculture, forestry & fishing | Dairy Farming |
| | Farm (Domestic Duties) |
| | Farmer |
| | Fishing Trawler (Fisherman, Clean Fish) |
| | Lobster Fisherman |
| Airline | Aircraft Technician |
| | Air Hostess |
| | Airline Maintenance |
| | Baggage Handler |
| | Cabin Manager |
| | Crew Manager |
| | Crewing Officer |
| | Customer Service Officer |
| | Flight Attendant |
| | International Cabin Manager |
| | International Flight Attendant Manager |
| | Leading Hand |
| | Manager |
| | Manager Cabin Crew |
| | Manager (Crew Related) |
| | OH&S Training |
| | Operations Officer |
| | Pilot |
| | Porter |
| | Purser |
| | Ramp Services |
| | Reservations Controller |
| | Resource Planning |
| | Security Lounge Porter |
| | Senior Flight Attendant |
| | Storeman |
| | Supervisor |
| | Team Leader (Movement Control) |
| | Team Manager (Line Operations) |
| | Team Manager |
| | Technical Crewing Officer |
| Architectural services | Apprentice |
| | Architect (Reporting) |
| | Architect |
| | Architectural Technician |
| | Draftsman |
| | Draftsman (University) |
| Defence forces | Air Force (Aircraft maintenance) |
| | Air Force (RAAF Maintenance) |
| | Army (Op. Spec) |
| | Navy (Clearance Diver) |
| | Navy (Petty Officer) |
| | Navy (Petty Officer/Painter) |
| | Navy (Servicing Jet Aircraft) |
| | Navy (Servicing Jet Aircraft–Missile Range) |
| Community, social services & non-profit | CFA Fire Fighter (Volunteer) |
| | Community Aid Abroad (Administration Assistant) |
| | Community Job Project (Railway) |
| | Community Services – Victorian Disability Services (Housing Project Officer) |
| | Residential Direct Care – Intellectual Disability (Residential Care Worker) |
| | Residential Direct Care – Intellectual Disability (Liaison Officer) |
| | Drug & Alcohol Advisory Committee (Volunteer) |
| | Employee Assistance Professional Association – Australian President |

| Area of work | Examples |
|---|---|
| Community, social services & non-profit cont. | HR & Psych Consulting |
| | Job Placement Officer (Volunteer) |
| | Meals on Wheels (Volunteer) |
| | OH&S Industry Advisory Convener |
| | Psychologist 1 & 2 |
| | School (Volunteer) |
| | Student Counsellor |
| | Youth Drop-In Centre (Youth Leader) |
| Construction industry | Asbestos Removal |
| | Carpenter |
| | Civil Engineer |
| | Concreter |
| | Crane Driver |
| | Dogman |
| | Elevated Work Platform Operator |
| | Labourer |
| | Leading Hand |
| | Plumber |
| | Rigger |
| | Scaffolder |
| | Steel Erection |
| | Trades Assistant |
| | Tradesman (Fitting & Machining, Toolmaker, Boilermaker, Painter, Carpenter) |
| | Truck Driver |
| Education and training | Art Teacher |
| | Children's Librarian |
| | Demonstrator |
| | Demonstrator (Nuclear Medicine) |
| | English Teaching (Overseas) |
| | Health Service |
| | Librarian |
| | Maths Teacher |
| | Physics Teacher |
| | Research |
| | Science Teacher |
| | Supply Teaching (Self-Employed) |
| | Teacher of Travel & Tourism |
| | Teacher |
| | Teacher (Adult Education) |
| | Teaching Principal |
| | Trainee Trainer in OH&S |
| | Trainer |
| | Tutor |
| Engineering | Civil Engineer |
| | Civil Engineer (Consultant – Land Development) |
| | Design Engineer |
| | Development Engineer |
| | Engineer Mechanic (Mental Hospital) |
| | Engineer |
| | Manager |
| | Production Engineer |
| | Project Engineer (Consulting Engineer Manufacturing Mechanical Engineering Company) |
| | Sales Engineer |
| | Technical Engineer |
| | Test Engineer |

| Area of work | Examples |
|---|---|
| Finance | Accountant |
| | Accounts Payable Officer |
| | Accounts Receivable Officer |
| | Assistant Manager |
| | Bank President |
| | Bank Teller |
| | Book Keeper |
| | Branch President |
| | Budget Officer |
| | Co-ordinator Redevelopment (Head Office) |
| | Cosmetic Company (Accounts Clerk) |
| | Customer Service Officer |
| | Information Teller |
| | Lending Officer |
| | Manager of Strategy Development Office |
| | Manager Stationery Dept |
| | Manager |
| | National Manager Acquisition & Supply |
| | Payroll Officer |
| | Project Manager |
| | Reconciliation Officer |
| | Relieving Accountant |
| | Senior Accountant Clerk |
| | Stationery Administration |
| | Union National Treasurer |
| Food industry | Baker |
| | Baker's Apprentice |
| | Kitchen Hand |
| | Cook |
| | Waitress |
| | Seafood Preparation (Process Worker) |
| | Inspection (Food Industry) |
| | Manager (Food Industry) |
| | Packing (Food Industry) |
| | Process Worker (Food Industry) |
| | Quality Control (Food Industry) |
| | Boiler Maker (Food Industry) |
| | Food Harvesting |
| Health/hospitals | AIN |
| | Clerk |
| | Hospital Security |
| | Maintenance (Engineer Mechanic) |
| | Medical Centre (Assistant Manager) |
| | Medical Diagnostics (Manager) |
| | Nurse Aide |
| | Senior Security |
| Horticulture | Florist (Manager) |
| | Florist (Propnetor) |
| | Florist (Shop Assistant) |
| | Gardener |
| | Landscape Designer |
| | Landscape Designer (Self-Employed) |
| | Landscape Gardener |
| | Nurseryman |
| | Nursery (Manager) |
| | Retail Nursery (Apprentice) |
| | Self-employed |
| | Supervisor |
| | Workplace Trainer |

| Area of work | Examples |
|---|---|
| Hospitality | Barman |
| | Catering Manager |
| | Chef |
| | Cleaner |
| | Cook Manager |
| | Cook |
| | Cook (Tourism Industry) |
| | Dishwasher |
| | Drinks Waiter |
| | F & B Manger |
| | Kitchen Hand |
| | Café Manager (Self-Employed) |
| | Waiter/Waitress |
| | Waiter/Waitress (Food/Bar) |
| Information technology | Computer Operator |
| | Computer Programmer |
| | Computer Repairs |
| | Computer Tutor |
| | Consulting (I.T Manager) |
| | IT Consultancy (Office Manager) |
| | IT Specialist |
| | Independent Contractor. |
| | Senior Computer Operator |
| Manufacturing & production | Assembler |
| | Food Processing (Operator Maintenance) |
| | Group Leader Packing Line (Winery) |
| | Inspection (Food Industry) |
| | Ledger Machinist (Brewery) |
| | Machine Operator |
| | Manufacturing Ceramic Products |
| | Manager |
| | Manager (Food Industry) |
| | Operations Manager |
| | Operator |
| | Packing (Food Industry) |
| | Process Worker |
| | Process Worker (Food Industry) |
| | Production Manager |
| | Production Planner |
| | Quality Control |
| | Quality Control (Food Industry) |
| | Sales Engineer |
| | Sales/Technician Co-ordinator |
| | Sales Manager |
| | Supervisor (Food Industry) |
| | Textile, clothing, footwear (Weaver, Comptometrist, Machinist, Tier & Warp Gaiter, Tuner, Machine Operator, OH&S Aware, Inspection of Quality, Quality Control – Process Work, Mechanic, Project Officer) |
| | Training Standards Supervisor |
| Marketing | Advertiser (Real Estate) |
| | Market Research |
| | Telemarketer |
| | Sales |
| | Sales & Marketing Representative (Cigarette Industry) |
| Mining industry | Boiler Maker |
| | Crusher Operator |
| | Driver |
| | Mill Operator |

| Area of work | Examples |
|---|---|
| Office work | Administration Assistant |
| | Administration Clerk (Telemarketing Company) |
| | Administration Manager |
| | Administration Manager (Rubber Recycling Plant) |
| | Administration Officer |
| | Administration Officer (Registered Training Organisation) |
| | Clerical Assistant |
| | Clerical |
| | Front Office Reception |
| | Group Co-ordinator |
| | Hotel Receptionist (Not Computerised) |
| | Mail Dispatch Clerk (Conference Organiser) |
| | Management |
| | Office Co-ordinator (Electrical Engineering Contractor) |
| | Office Manager |
| | Receptionist |
| | Receptionist (Advertising Agency) |
| | Representative |
| | Secretary |
| Other miscellaneous | Assistant Hairdresser |
| | Casino (Recruitment Consultant) |
| | Designer/Pattern Maker (Fashion Industry) |
| | Fitness Instructor |
| | Fruit Picking |
| | Funeral Director |
| | Gas Distribution Manager |
| | Graphic Designer Assistant |
| | Interviewer (Research Firm) |
| | Job Placement Officer |
| | Owner-Operator Go-Cart Track |
| | Pre School/Mothercraft (Child Care Centre) |
| | Stock Management |
| Retailwholesale sales | Administration Manager |
| | Blinds |
| | Boutique Shop Owner |
| | Business Manager |
| | Butcher's Shop |
| | Checkout Operator (Food Industry) |
| | Checkout Operator (Supermarket) |
| | Commercial Vehicle Sales (Sales Person) |
| | Counter Sales |
| | Customer Service Assistant |
| | Director (Self-Employed) |
| | Extension Sales |
| | Furniture Sales |
| | Human Relations Manager |
| | Ice Supplies (Manager) |
| | Manager |
| | Milk Bar Operator (Self-Employed) |
| | Occupational Health & Safety Representative |
| | Office Work |
| | Operations Assistant |
| | Produce (Fruit & Veg) Manager |
| | Real Estate (Area Manager) |
| | Retail Assistant |
| | Sales & Marketing Representative (Cigarette Industry) |
| | Sales Assistant |
| | Sales Assistant (Confectionary Shop, Jewellery Shop, Knitting Wool Shop, Supermarket) |
| | Sales Representative |
| | Service Station Attendant |

| Area of work | Examples |
|---|---|
| Retail/wholesale sales (cont.) | Service Supervisor |
| | Shop Assistant |
| | Shop Console |
| | Stall member for photos with Santa |
| | Store Manager |
| | Store Person |
| | Supervisor |
| Telecommunications | Apprentice Technician |
| | Apprentice Tradesman |
| | Assistant Technician |
| | Communication Officer |
| | Complaints Officer |
| | Credit Checking (Data Processor) |
| | Customer Service |
| | Draftsman |
| | Event Manager |
| | Field Supervisor |
| | Installation Officer |
| | Installation Supervisor |
| | Mobile Customer Care Operator |
| | Phone Operator |
| | Principal Technical Officer 1 & 2 |
| | Principal Technical Officer |
| | Project Co-ordinator |
| | Project Officer |
| | Promotion Manager |
| | Scientist |
| | Senior Technical Officer (Supervisor) |
| | Senior Technical Officer 1 & 2 |
| | Senior Telecommunications Technical Officer |
| | Supervisor |
| | Team Leader |
| | Technical Officer 1 & 2 |
| | Technical Officer |
| | Technical Training Officer |
| | Technician in Training |
| | Technician |
| | Tester |
| | Testing Officer |
| | Trainee Technical Officer |
| Tourism | Boat Cruises (HR & Training Manager) |
| | Computer Help |
| | Desk Operator |
| | Driver (Tourist Buses) |
| | Sales |
| | Shopping Spree Tours (Bus Hostess) |
| | Tour Leader |
| | Training |
| | Travel Agent |
| Trades & services | Apprentice Boiler Maker (Railways) |
| | Apprentice Framer |
| | Auto Electrician (Apprentice) |
| | Boiler Maker (Electrical) |
| | Boiler Maker (Food Industry) |
| | Boiler Maker (Railways) |
| | Carpet & Interior Suppliers (Personal Assistant) |
| | Carpet (Machine Operator) |
| | Cleaner |
| | Commercial Cleaner |
| | Draftsman (Electrical) |
| | Draftsman grades 1,2,3 & 4 (Electrical) |

| Area of work | Examples |
|---|---|
| Trades & services (cont.) | Electrical Contractor (Office Co-ordinator) |
| | Electrical Contractor (Service Co-ordinator) |
| | Electrical Tester |
| | Electronics Repair (TV Repairman) |
| | Electronics Technician (Tourism) |
| | Engineer (Electrical) |
| | Fire Appliance Attendant (Electrical) |
| | Fire Officer (Electrical) |
| | Foreman (Electrical) |
| | Home Presenter & Repairer (Owner/Operator) |
| | Hospital (Laundry Cleaner) |
| | Leading Hand (Gas Industry) |
| | Machine Operator (Cable) |
| | Machine Operator (Carpets) |
| | Mechanic (Self-Employed) |
| | Motor Mechanic |
| | Operator (Electrical) |
| | Operations Manager |
| | Production |
| | QAS Distribution (Manager) |
| | Regional Draftsman - Group Leader (Electrical) |
| | Rigger (Electrical) |
| | Rubbish Collector (Self-Employed) |
| | Sales |
| | Scaffolder (Electrical) |
| | Security Officer |
| | Service Co-ordinator (Electrical Contractor) |
| | Service Industry (Operator) |
| | Supervisor (Electrical) |
| | Supervisor |
| | Tandem Operator (Cable) |
| | Tool Maker |
| | Tool Maker (White goods manufacturer) |
| | Trades Assistant (Electrical) |
| | Tradesman (Airline) |
| | Tradesman (Electrical) |
| | Trainee Draftsman (Electrical) |
| | Whitegoods Manufacturer (Serviceman) |
| | Whitegoods Mechanic (Self-Employed) |
| | Window Assembly & Glazing |
| Transport | Bus driver |
| | Owner operator |
| | Pilot |
| | Taxi driver |
| | Truck Driver (Removals, Courier, Distribution) |
| | Truck Driver (Owner) |
| Warehousing | Administration |
| | Driving |
| | Forklift Operator |
| | Gas |
| | Mining |
| | Steel |
| | Stock Management |
| | Storeman |
| | Storeman/Driver (Aluminium Products) |
| | Storeman (Satellite/Cable Company) |
| | Stores Assistant |
| | Stores |
| | Training & Development Manager |
| | Warehouse Manager |

**Table 14: Relevance of skills learnt at work (on the job) to current employability**

| Relevance (5-point scale) | | Number of responses | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Not at all relevant | 1 | 27 | 5.1 |
| | 2 | 35 | 6.6 |
| Neutral | 3 | 50 | 9.4 |
| | 4 | 129 | 24.2 |
| Very relevant | 5 | 188 | 35.3 |
| Not stated | | 104 | 19.5 |
| **Total** | | **533*** | **100.1** |

Note: *Includes all jobs listed by participants

**Table 15: Current employment status**

| Employed | | | Unemployed | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Status | Number | Percentage | Status | Number | Percentage |
| Full time | 7 | 25.0 | Seeking work | 91 | 91.9 |
| Part time | 8 | 28.5 | | | |
| Sessional/casual | 12 | 42.9 | Not seeking work | 8 | 8.1 |
| Other | 1 | 3.6 | | | |
| **Total** | **28** | **100.0** | | **99** | **100.0** |
| **Percentage** | **22** | | | **78** | **100.0** |

**Table 16: Time unemployed following displacement from the workforce**

| Time unemployed | Number of responses | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 0–3 months | 64 | 50.4 |
| 4–6 months | 16 | 12.6 |
| 7–12 months | 14 | 11.0 |
| 13–18 months | 5 | 3.9 |
| 19–24 months | 2 | 1.6 |
| More than 2 years | 25 | 19.7 |
| Not stated | 1 | 0.8 |
| **Total** | **127** | **100.0** |

**Table 17: Reason for displacement from the workforce**

| Reason for displacement | Number of responses | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| End of contract/job | 10 | 7.9 |
| Workplace closed | 32 | 25.2 |
| Job made redundant | 52 | 40.9 |
| Voluntary redundancy | 11 | 8.7 |
| Injury/accident | 7 | 5.5 |
| Other | 12 | 9.4 |
| Not stated | 3 | 2.4 |
| **Total** | **127** | **100.0** |

# Appendix D: Responses to questions relating to generic skills

**Table 18: Self-assessment of skills by skill area**

| Skill area | Self-assessment of skills (percentage of responses) | | | | | | | | | | Total % | Average score /10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Low | | | | | | | | | High | | |
| | *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* | *6* | *7* | *8* | *9* | *10* | | |
| 1 | 0 | 0.8 | 0 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 5.6 | 13.5 | 38.1 | 23.0 | 14.3 | **100.0** | 8.06 |
| 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 5.6 | 13.6 | 32.2 | 24.0 | 12.8 | **100.0** | 8.08 |
| 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.6 | 4.8 | 8.8 | 26.4 | 27.2 | 31.2 | **100.0** | 8.66 |
| 4 | 0 | 3.2 | 5.6 | 5.6 | 6.3 | 11.1 | 17.5 | 19.8 | 18.2 | 12.7 | **100.0** | 7.40 |
| 5 | 0.8 | 0 | 0.8 | 0 | 0.8 | 4.8 | 12.0 | 28.8 | 33.6 | 18.4 | **100.0** | 8.37 |
| 6 | 7.2 | 4.0 | 7.2 | 6.4 | 9.6 | 10.4 | 16.0 | 16.8 | 12.8 | 9.6 | **100.0** | 6.30 |
| 7 | 0 | 0 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 4.0 | 7.1 | 27.0 | 26.2 | 14.3 | 18.2 | **100.0** | 7.83 |
| 8 | 3.2 | 3.2 | 4.8 | 4.8 | 8.0 | 8.0 | 17.6 | 33.6 | 12.8 | 4.0 | **100.0** | 6.78 |
| 9 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 3.25 | 1.6 | 4.1 | 0.8 | 16.3 | 27.6 | 22.8 | 22.0 | **100.0** | 8.03 |
| 10 | 1.9 | 0 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 4.9 | 4.9 | 19.4 | 23.2 | 25.2 | 13.6 | **100.0** | 7.78 |
| **Average total** | **1.4** | **1.2** | **2.5** | **2.7** | **4.4** | **6.4** | **16.1** | **28.3** | **21.3** | **15.7** | **100.0** | **7.70** |

Note: Totals may not add exactly to 100 due to rounding

Legend for skill areas:

Skill area 1: Communication skills
Skill area 2: Planning and organising activities
Skill area 3: Working with others and in teams
Skill area 4: Using mathematical ideas and techniques
Skill area 5: Solving problems
Skill area 6: Using information technology
Skill area 7: Cultural understanding
Skill area 8: Understanding/designing systems
Skill area 9: Adapting to change
Skill area 10: Being creative and innovative

**Table 19: Sources of skill development**

| Where did you learn this skill[1] | Skill area[2] | | | | | | | | | | Across all skill areas |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | % |
| Home/family/community | 80.3 | 62.2 | 62.2 | 45.6 | 61.4 | 26.7 | 58.3 | 14.8 | 48.8 | 59.0 | 51.9 |
| School | 48.8 | 38.6 | 42.5 | 67.2 | 36.2 | 19.2 | 26.0 | 12.3 | 20.5 | 35.2 | 34.7 |
| Formal course (post-school) | 39.4 | 26.0 | 26.8 | 29.6 | 29.1 | 42.5 | 16.5 | 23.8 | 18.1 | 20.0 | 27.2 |
| Work | 89.0 | 89.8 | 93.7 | 82.4 | 91.3 | 78.3 | 81.9 | 90.2 | 87.4 | 80.0 | 86.4 |
| Experience/self-taught | 78.4 | 70.9 | 65.4 | 58.4 | 74.8 | 71.7 | 66.1 | 61.5 | 74.8 | 86.7 | 70.9 |
| Other | 17.3 | 9.4 | 5.5 | 6.4 | 7.1 | 1.7 | 5.5 | 5.7 | 5.5 | 9.5 | 7.4 |

Notes [1] Respondents were asked to tick all which applied
[2] See table 18 for skill areas

**Table 20: Most important source of skill development**

| Source[1] | Skill area[2] | | | | | | | | | | Across all skill areas |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | % |
| Home/family/community | 15.0 | 13.1 | 16.5 | 5.6 | 14.4 | 2.9 | 23.7 | 0.9 | 10.9 | 11.0 | 11.4 |
| School | 1.9 | 0.9 | 3.7 | 29.0 | 0.9 | 4.9 | 1.8 | 0.9 | 0.0 | 6.6 | 5.1 |
| Formal course (post-school) | 7.5 | 3.7 | 1.8 | 11.2 | 7.2 | 19.4 | 0.9 | 5.5 | 3.6 | 2.2 | 6.3 |
| Work | 53.3 | 62.6 | 65.1 | 39.3 | 54.1 | 41.7 | 47.4 | 76.1 | 53.6 | 37.4 | 53.1 |
| Experience/self-taught | 18.7 | 16.8 | 11.0 | 13.1 | 21.6 | 30.1 | 25.4 | 16.5 | 28.2 | 41.8 | 22.3 |
| Other | 3.7 | 2.8 | 1.8 | 1.9 | 1.8 | 0.9 | 0.9 | 0.0 | 3.6 | 1.1 | 1.9 |
| **Total** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |

Notes [1] Respondents were asked to tick one only
[2] See table 18 for skill areas
Totals may not add exactly to 100 due to rounding

**Table 21: Importance of skills to work**

| Skill area | Response to statement 'My skills were (are) very important to the work I performed (perform) in my last (current) job' | | | | | Total % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 1 | 0 | 1.4 | 11.4 | 24.3 | 62.9 | 100.0 |
| 2 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 10.0 | 27.1 | 57.1 | 100.0 |
| 3 | 0 | 4.3 | 8.7 | 23.2 | 63.8 | 100.0 |
| 4 | 7.1 | 7.1 | 24.3 | 32.9 | 28.6 | 100.0 |
| 5 | 2.9 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 39.1 | 55.1 | 100.0 |
| 6 | 14.7 | 7.4 | 17.6 | 25.0 | 35.3 | 100.0 |
| 7 | 7.1 | 10.0 | 25.7 | 34.3 | 22.9 | 100.0 |
| 8 | 5.8 | 5.8 | 21.7 | 37.7 | 29.0 | 100.0 |
| 9 | 0 | 4.3 | 10.0 | 45.7 | 40.0 | 100.0 |
| 10 | 17.6 | 5.9 | 27.5 | 21.6 | 27.4 | 100.0 |
| **Total (across all skill areas)** | **5.5** | **5.0** | **16.5** | **31.4** | **42.6** | **100.0** |

Note: See table 18 for skill areas
Totals may not add exactly to 100 due to rounding

**Table 22: Opportunities to develop skills at work**

| Skill area | Response to statement 'In my last (current) job I was (am) given many opportunities to further develop my skills' | | | | | Total % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 1 | 8.6 | 11.4 | 24.3 | 30.0 | 25.7 | 100.0 |
| 2 | 7.1 | 7.1 | 27.1 | 30.0 | 28.6 | 100.0 |
| 3 | 2.9 | 4.3 | 17.4 | 34.8 | 40.6 | 100.0 |
| 4 | 10.0 | 22.9 | 22.9 | 32.8 | 11.4 | 100.0 |
| 5 | 4.3 | 10.1 | 8.7 | 40.6 | 36.2 | 100.0 |
| 6 | 19.1 | 13.2 | 19.1 | 32.4 | 16.2 | 100.0 |
| 7 | 12.9 | 18.6 | 31.4 | 21.4 | 15.7 | 100.0 |
| 8 | 8.7 | 11.6 | 26.1 | 37.7 | 15.9 | 100.0 |
| 9 | 2.9 | 14.3 | 17.1 | 34.3 | 31.4 | 100.0 |
| 10 | 2.0 | 3.9 | 9.8 | 39.2 | 45.1 | 100.0 |
| **Total (across all skill areas)** | **8.0** | **12.0** | **20.7** | **33.1** | **26.2** | **100.0** |

Note: See table 18 for skill areas
Totals may not add exactly to 100 due to rounding

**Table 23: Assessment of skills in relation to work sought**

| Skill area | Response to statement 'My skills are good enough to meet the expectations of the work I am aiming for (in my current job)' | | | | | Total % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Strongly disagree 1 | Disagree 2 | Neutral 3 | Agree 4 | Strongly agree 5 | |
| 1 | 2.9 | 1.4 | 7.2 | 55.1 | 33.3 | 100.0 |
| 2 | 1.4 | 15.7 | 34.3 | 48.6 | 0 | 100.0 |
| 3 | 0 | 0 | 7.3 | 42.0 | 50.7 | 100.0 |
| 4 | 4.3 | 7.1 | 18.6 | 44.3 | 25.7 | 100.0 |
| 5 | 0 | 2.9 | 1.4 | 50.0 | 45.7 | 100.0 |
| 6 | 14.7 | 7.3 | 16.2 | 35.3 | 26.5 | 100.0 |
| 7 | 0 | 4.3 | 15.7 | 51.4 | 28.6 | 100.0 |
| 8 | 4.3 | 5.8 | 23.2 | 50.7 | 15.9 | 100.0 |
| 9 | 0 | 7.1 | 7.1 | 50.0 | 35.7 | 100.0 |
| 10 | 5.9 | 3.9 | 15.7 | 31.4 | 43.1 | 100.0 |
| **Total (across all skill areas)** | **3.3** | **5.6** | **14.6** | **46.3** | **30.2** | **100.0** |

Note: See table 18 for skill areas
Totals may not add exactly to 100 due to rounding

**Table 24: Confidence that skills will help employment prospects**

| Skill area | Response to statement 'I am confident that the skills I have developed will help (have helped) me to get another job' | | | | | Total % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Strongly disagree 1 | Disagree 2 | Neutral 3 | Agree 4 | Strongly agree 5 | |
| 1 | 7.1 | 5.7 | 15.7 | 38.06 | 32.9 | 100.0 |
| 2 | 2.9 | 4.4 | 16.2 | 42.6 | 33.8 | 100.0 |
| 3 | 0.0 | 7.1 | 10.0 | 40.0 | 42.9 | 100.0 |
| 4 | 5.7 | 10.0 | 22.9 | 38.6 | 22.8 | 100.0 |
| 5 | 0.0 | 4.3 | 10.0 | 44.3 | 41.4 | 100.0 |
| 6 | 16.2 | 11.8 | 22.1 | 26.5 | 23.5 | 100.0 |
| 7 | 2.9 | 10.0 | 21.4 | 41.4 | 24.3 | 100.0 |
| 8 | 5.8 | 10.1 | 18.8 | 46.4 | 18.8 | 100.0 |
| 9 | 0.0 | 8.6 | 15.7 | 40.0 | 35.7 | 100.0 |
| 10 | 5.9 | 7.8 | 13.7 | 41.2 | 31.4 | 100.0 |
| **Total (across all skill areas)** | **4.6** | **8.0** | **16.7** | **39.9** | **30.8** | **100.0** |

Note: See table 18 for skill areas
Totals may not add exactly to 100 due to rounding

**Table 25: Responses to statements**

| Statements | Percentage of responses | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree | Total |
| I have found that my general skills readily transfer to new areas of work | 7.1 | 1.4 | 22.9 | 37.1 | 31.4 | **100.0** |
| In order to find work I have found it necessary to continually learn new work skills | 0.0 | 1.4 | 11.4 | 38.6 | 48.6 | **100.0** |
| It is important to me that my work makes a contribution to the good of society. | 2.9 | 2.9 | 20.0 | 35.7 | 38.6 | **100.0** |
| It is up to my employer to train me in the general skills I need at work. | 7.1 | 11.4 | 28.6 | 35.7 | 17.1 | **100.0** |
| My prospects for employment have more to do with the available local jobs than my skills. | 5.8 | 13.0 | 20.3 | 23.2 | 37.7 | **100.0** |
| There are jobs available but I am not 'in' with the local scene so I am not likely to be successful. | 14.7 | 30.9 | 20.6 | 20.6 | 13.2 | **100.0** |
| Employers want people who are younger than me. | 7.1 | 11.4 | 21.4 | 21.4 | 38.6 | **100.0** |
| I am prepared to compromise my values to get a job. | 38.6 | 20.0 | 18.6 | 12.8 | 10.0 | **100.0** |
| Employers are more interested in paper qualifications than real skills. | 5.7 | 8.6 | 28.6 | 24.3 | 32.8 | **100.0** |
| Written assessments of my general skills would help me to get another job. | 4.3 | 2.9 | 34.8 | 42.0 | 15.9 | **100.0** |
| I find it difficult to accept that I have to market my skills. | 12.9 | 17.1 | 21.4 | 31.4 | 17.1 | **100.0** |
| I am optimistic that I will be able to get another job at the same level of work that I have done in the past. | 18.6 | 30.0 | 12.8 | 15.7 | 22.9 | **100.0** |
| I taught myself things I needed to know for work. | 1.4 | 7.1 | 12.9 | 38.6 | 40.0 | **100.0** |
| An active imagination is a valuable asset at work. | 1.4 | 2.9 | 15.7 | 42.9 | 37.1 | **100.0** |

Note: Totals may not add exactly to 100 due to rounding

# Appendix E: Survey instrument

# QUESTIONNAIRE

*Generic Skills & the Displaced Worker*

**1. Age**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 16 – 20 yrs | ☐ | 41 – 45 yrs | ☐ |
| 21 – 25 yrs | ☐ | 46 – 50 yrs | ☐ |
| 26 – 30 yrs | ☐ | 51 – 55 yrs | ☐ |
| 31 – 35 yrs | ☐ | 56 – 60 yrs | ☐ |
| 36 – 40 yrs | ☐ | Over 60 yrs | ☐ |

**2. Gender**

Male ☐ Female ☐

**3. Country of Birth**

Australia ☐

Other ☐ Country _____

**4. First Language**

English ☐

Other ☐ Language _____

**5. Other Languages**

_____

_____

_____

**6. Schooling**

Highest Level Completed

Year/Grade ☐

Age left school in years

Age ☐

## 7. Post-School Training/Education

**Have you done post-school training education?** | **Yes** | | **No** | |

**If YES complete the following table:**

| Place of Training (eg. Work, TAFE, Uni) | Name of Course or Description (eg. Electrical apprentice, Conflict Resolution) | Duration of Course | Completed (circle answer) | Qualification If Applicable | Year Completed | Relevance of skills learnt to current employability (circle one answer) *Not at all Relevant* | | *Neutral* | | *Very Relevant* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Example TAFE* | *Electrical Apprenticeship* | 4 years | *Yes/No* | *A Grade Electrician* | *1983* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| *Example Work* | *Customer Relations* | *2 Hours* | *Yes/No* | *N/A* | *1999* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | Yes/No | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | Yes/No | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | Yes/No | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | Yes/No | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | Yes/No | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**8. Time unemployed following displacement from the workforce**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0-3 months | ☐ | 13-18 months | ☐ |
| 4-6 months | ☐ | 19-24 months | ☐ |
| 7-12 months | ☐ | more than 2 yrs | ☐ |

**9. Reason for displacement**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| End of contract/job | ☐ | Voluntary redundancy | ☐ |
| Workplace Closed | ☐ | Displaced by injury/accident | ☐ |
| Your job made redundant | ☐ | Other_____ (Reason) | ☐ |

**10. Current Employment Status**

Please complete 1 column only.

| **Employed** ☐ | **Unemployed** |
|---|---|
| Full Time ☐ | Are you seeking work YES / NO |
| Part-time ☐ | Comments_____ |
| Sessional/Casual ☐ | _____ |
| Other _____ (Please Specify) ☐ | _____ |
| Comments_____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

**11. Number of different jobs/positions (shifts/changes in career) you have undertaken**
**(eg. waitress, shop assistant, call centre telephone operator = 3 or technician, supervisor = 2)**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | ☐ | 4 | ☐ |
| 2 | ☐ | 5 | ☐ |
| 3 | ☐ | more than 5 | ☐ |

## 12. Employment History

| Type of Company/Place of Employment (or name of enterprise/industry) | Job(s)/Position(s) held | Approximate length of employment | Relevance of skills learnt to current employability (circle one answer) *Not at all relevant* | | *Neutral* | | *Very Relevant* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Example* *SEC* | *Operator* | *7 years* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | *Leading Hand* | 3 years | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| *Example* *Call Centre* | *Phone Operator* | *1.5 Years* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

13. **Source and Use of General Skills**

**Skill Area: 1. Communication Skills**

**Section A**

How would you grade your *communication skills*? (circle one number)

| Low | | | | | | | | | High |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

**Section B**

| Where did you learn this skill? (tick all that apply) | | What was the *most important* source of your skills (tick one) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Home/family/community | | Home/family/community |
| | School | | School |
| | Formal course (post school) | | Formal course (post school) |
| | Work | | Work |
| | Experience/self-taught | | Experience/self-taught |
| | Other | | Other |

**Section C**

| Please circle one answer for each statement | Strongly Disagree | | Neutral | | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My *communication skills* were (are) very important to the work I performed (perform) in my last (current) job? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In my last (current) job I was (am) given many opportunities to further develop my *communication skills*. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am good enough at *communicating* to meet the expectations of the work I am aiming for (in my current job). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am confident that the *communication skills* I have developed will help (have helped) me to get another job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Are there any other comments that you would like to make?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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## Skill Area: 2. Planning and organising activities

**Section A**

How would you grade your skills in *planning and organising?* (circle one number)

| Low | | | | | | | | | High |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

**Section B**

| | Where did you learn this skill? (tick all that apply) | | What was the *most important* source of your skills (tick one) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Home/family/community | | Home/family/community |
| | School | | School |
| | Formal course (post school) | | Formal course (post school) |
| | Work | | Work |
| | Experience/self-taught | | Experience/self-taught |
| | Other | | Other |

| Please circle one answer for each statement | Strongly Disagree | | Neutral | | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My skills in *planning and organising* were (are) very important to the work I performed (perform) in my last (current) job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In my last (current) job I was (am) given many opportunities to further develop my skills in *planning and organising*. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am good enough at *planning and organising* to meet the expectations of the work I am aiming for (in my current job). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am confident that the skills I have developed in *planning and organising* will help (have helped) me to get another job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**Section C**

Are there any other comments that you would like to make?_____

_____

_____

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## Skill Area: 3. Working with others and in teams

**Section A**

How would you grade your skills in *working with others and in teams* (circle one number)

| Low | | | | | | | | | High |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

**Section B**

| Where did you learn this skill? (tick all that apply) | | What was the *most important* source of your skills (tick one) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Home/family/community | | Home/family/community |
| | School | | School |
| | Formal course (post school) | | Formal course (post school) |
| | Work | | Work |
| | Experience/self-taught | | Experience/self-taught |
| | Other | | Other |

**Section C**

| Please circle one answer for each statement | Strongly Disagree | | Neutral | | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My *teamworking* skills were (are) very important to the work I performed (perform) in my last (current) job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In my last (current) job I was (am) given many opportunities to further develop my skills *in working with others and in teams.* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am good enough at *working with others and in teams* to meet the expectations of the work I am aiming for (in my current job). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am confident that the skills I have developed in *working with others and in teams* will help (have helped) me to get another job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Are there any other comments that you would like to make?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____



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## Skill Area: 4. Using mathematical ideas and techniques

Measuring quantities/tolerances, production quotas, money stock-taking, calculating bonuses/discounts, financial planning, budgeting.

**Section A**

How would you grade your skills in using *mathematical ideas and techniques* (measuring quantities/tolerances, production quotas, money stock-taking, calculating bonuses/discounts, financial planning, budgeting) (circle one number)

| Low | | | | | | | | | High |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

**Section B**

| Where did you learn this skill? (tick all that apply) | | What was the *most important* source of your skills (tick one) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Home/family/community | | Home/family/community |
| | School | | School |
| | Formal course (post school) | | Formal course (post school) |
| | Work | | Work |
| | Experience/self-taught | | Experience/self-taught |
| | Other | | Other |

**Section C**

| Please circle one answer for each statement | Strongly Disagree | | Neutral | | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My ability to *use mathematical ideas and techniques* was very important to the work I performed (perform) in my last (current) job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In my last (current) job I was (am) given many opportunities to further develop my skills in using *mathematics* at work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am good enough at using *mathematical ideas and techniques* to meet the expectations of the work I am aiming for (in my current job). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am confident that the skills I have developed in using *mathematical ideas and techniques* will help (have helped) me to get another job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Are there any other comments that you would like to make?_____

_____

_____



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## Skill Area: 5. Solving problems

Identifying the source of problems, examining alternatives, finding solutions.

**Section A**

| How would you grade your skills in *solving problems* (circle one number) | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Low | | | | | | | | | High |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

**Section B**

| | Where did you learn this skill? (tick all that apply) | | What was the *most important* source of your skills (tick one) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Home/family/community | | Home/family/community |
| | School | | School |
| | Formal course (post school) | | Formal course (post school) |
| | Work | | Work |
| | Experience/self-taught | | Experience/self-taught |
| | Other | | Other |

**Section C**

| Please circle one answer for each statement | Strongly Disagree | | Neutral | | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My skills in *solving problems* were (are) very important to the work I performed (perform) in my last (current) job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In my last (current) job I was (am) given many opportunities to further develop my *problem-solving* skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am good enough at *solving problems* to meet the expectations of the work I am aiming for (in my current job). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am confident that the skills I have developed in *problem solving* will help (have helped) me to get another job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Are there any other comments that you would like to make?_____

_____

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## Skill Area: 6. Using information technology

Computers, computer-operated equipment, internet, telecommunications.

**Section A**

How would you grade your skills in *using technology* (circle one number)

| Low | | | | | | | | | High |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

**Section B**

| | Where did you learn this skill? (tick all that apply) | | What was the *most important* source of your skills (tick one) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Home/family/community | | Home/family/community |
| | School | | School |
| | Formal course (post school) | | Formal course (post school) |
| | Work | | Work |
| | Experience/self-taught | | Experience/self-taught |
| | Other | | Other |

**Section C**

| Please circle one answer for each statement | Strongly Disagree | | Neutral | | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My skills in *using information technology* were (are) very important to the work I performed (perform) in my last (current) job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In my last (current) job I was (am) given many opportunities to further develop my skills in the *use of information technology*. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am good enough at *using information technology* to meet the expectations of the work I am aiming for (in my current job). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am confident that the skills I have developed in *using information technology* will help (have helped) me to get another job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Are there any other comments that you would like to make?_____

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## Skills Area: 7. Cultural understanding

Working with people from different ethnic backgrounds and languages.

**Section A**

| How would you grade your skills in *Cultural understanding* (circle one number) | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Low | | | | | | | | | High |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

**Section B**

| Where did you learn this skill? (tick all that apply) | | What was the *most important* source of your skills (tick one) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Home/family/community | | Home/family/community |
| | School | | School |
| | Formal course (post school) | | Formal course (post school) |
| | Work | | Work |
| | Experience/self-taught | | Experience/self-taught |
| | Other | | Other |

**Section C**

| Please circle one answer for each statement | Strongly Disagree | | Neutral | | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My skills in *working with people from different ethnic backgrounds & languages* were (are) very important to the work I performed in my last (current) job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In my last (current) job I was (am) given many opportunities to further develop my *understanding of different cultures.* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am good enough at *working with people from different ethnic backgrounds and languages* to meet the expectations of the work I am aiming for (in my current job). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am confident that the skills I have developed in *cultural understanding* will help (have helped) me to get another job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Are there any other comments that you would like to make?_____

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## Skill Area: 8. Understanding/designing systems

Production, OH&S, quality, management systems.

**Section A**

How would you grade your skills in *understanding/designing systems* (circle one number)

| Low | | | | | | | | | High |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

**Section B**

| Where did you learn this skill? (tick all that apply) | | What was the *most important* source of your skills (tick one) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Home/family/community | | Home/family/community |
| | School | | School |
| | Formal course (post school) | | Formal course (post school) |
| | Work | | Work |
| | Experience/self-taught | | Experience/self-taught |
| | Other | | Other |

**Section C**

| Please circle one answer for each statement | Strongly Disagree | | Neutral | | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My skills in *understanding and designing systems* were (are) very important to the work I performed (perform) in my last (current) job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In my last (current) job I was (am) given many opportunities to further develop my skills in *understanding and designing systems* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am good enough at *understanding and designing systems* to meet the expectations of the work I am aiming for (in my current job). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am confident that the skills I have developed in *understanding and designing systems* will help (have helped) me to get another job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Are there any other comments that you would like to make?_____

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## Skill Area: 9. Adapting to change

Changes in work practices, range of jobs, new responsibilities, and new technology.

**Section A**

How would you grade your skills in a*dapting to change* (circle one number)

| Low | | | | | | | | | High |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

**Section B**

| Where did you learn this skill? (tick all that apply) | | What was the *most important* source of your skills? (tick one) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Home/family/community | | Home/family/community |
| | School | | School |
| | Formal course (post school) | | Formal course (post school) |
| | Work | | Work |
| | Experience/self-taught | | Experience/self-taught |
| | Other | | Other |

**Section C**

| Please circle one answer for each statement | Strongly Disagree | | Neutral | | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My ability to *adapt to change* was (is) very important to the work I performed (perform) in my last (current) job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In my last (current) job I was (am) given many opportunities to further develop my skills in *adapting to change.* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am good enough at *adapting to change* to meet the expectations of the work I am aiming for (in my current job). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am confident that my ability to *adapt to change* will help (has helped) me to get another job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Are there any other comments that you would like to make?_____

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**Skill Area: 10. Being Creative and Innovative**

**Section A**

| How would you grade your *creative & innovative* skills (circle one number) | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Low | | | | | | | | | High |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

**Section B**

| Where did you learn this skill? (tick all that apply) | | What was the *most important* source of your skills? (tick one) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Home/family/community | | Home/family/community |
| | School | | School |
| | Formal course (post school) | | Formal course (post school) |
| | Work | | Work |
| | Experience/self-taught | | Experience/self-taught |
| | Other | | Other |

**Section C**

| Please circle one answer for each statement | Strongly Disagree | | Neutral | | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My *creative and innovative* skills were (are) very important to the work I performed (perform) in my last (current) job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In my last (current) job I was (am) given many opportunities to further develop my *creative and innovative* skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| My *creativity and innovative* skills are good enough to meet the expectations of the work I am aiming for (in my current job). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am confident that my *creativity and innovative* skills will help (have helped) me to get another job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Are there any other comments that you would like to make?_____

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**14. Employability & Other Issues** (Circle one answer for each statement)

| | Strongly Disagree | | Neutral | | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I have found that my general skills readily transfer to new areas of work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In order to find work I have found it necessary to continually learn new work skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| It is important to me that my work makes a contribution to the good of society. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| It is up to my employer to train me in the general skills I need at work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| My prospects for employment have more to do with the available local jobs than my skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| There are jobs available but I am not 'in' with the local scene so I am not likely to be successful. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Employers want people who are younger than me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am prepared to compromise my values to get a job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Employers are more interested in paper qualifications than real skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Written assessments of my general skills would help me to get another job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I find it difficult to accept that I have to market my skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am optimistic that I will be able to get another job at the same level of work that I have done in the past. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I taught myself things I needed to know for work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| An active imagination is a valuable asset at work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**15. Number of workplaces/organisations where you have been employed**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | ☐ | 4 | ☐ |
| 2 | ☐ | 5 | ☐ |
| 3 | ☐ | more than 5 | ☐ |

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